GARDEN PUBLICATION OF THE YEAR

GARDENS ILLUSTRATED

EXPERT TALKS
with
Tom Stuart-Smith
Stefano Marinaz
Jenny Barnes

Meet our horticultural Heroes

The garden champions making a real difference to places, people, plants and the planet

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Welcome

JOHN CAMPBELL

Gardeners are generous by nature, but there are those who really go above and beyond. This issue, we have decided to celebrate extraordinary people who give their time to good causes, who campaign and advocate for change, who innovate in the face of challenges like the climate and biodiversity crises, and who dedicate themselves to caring for and developing opportunities for others. We have named these garden champions our 2024 Horticultural Heroes, and throughout this issue of the magazine, you will find interesting interviews, profiles, stories and insights into the amazing things happening across the industry. You can learn more about some of the inspiring individuals who are making a real difference in our special feature on page 38.

Community gardens and public urban green spaces are becoming increasingly important, and this month we have two beautiful gardens with community at their heart: Sarah Price's design for The Exchange in Erith, southeast London (page 50), and Nigel Dunnett's exciting planting design for a vibrant city rooftop (page 74). We also find out how sustainable designer Miria Harris managed to create a no-skip but stylish garden (page 60). Elsewhere, professional gardener turned natural farmer Joshua Sparkes explains what led him to ditch traditional methods and embrace a different philosophy of growing (page 82); Dr Richard Claxton details all the science-backed ways that gardening is good for your health (page 80); and Charlotte Harris offers insights on how to design inclusive, accessible spaces (page 92). We know this barely scratches the surface and there are many more wonderful people doing incredible things for places, people, plants and the planet. Get in touch and let us know who your heroes are, and why – we'd love to hear from you.

Stephanie Mahon

STEPHANIE MAHON, EDITOR

ONLINE THIS MONTH

Click here to see Troy Scott Smith's expert advice on how to stop birds eating your lawn seed.

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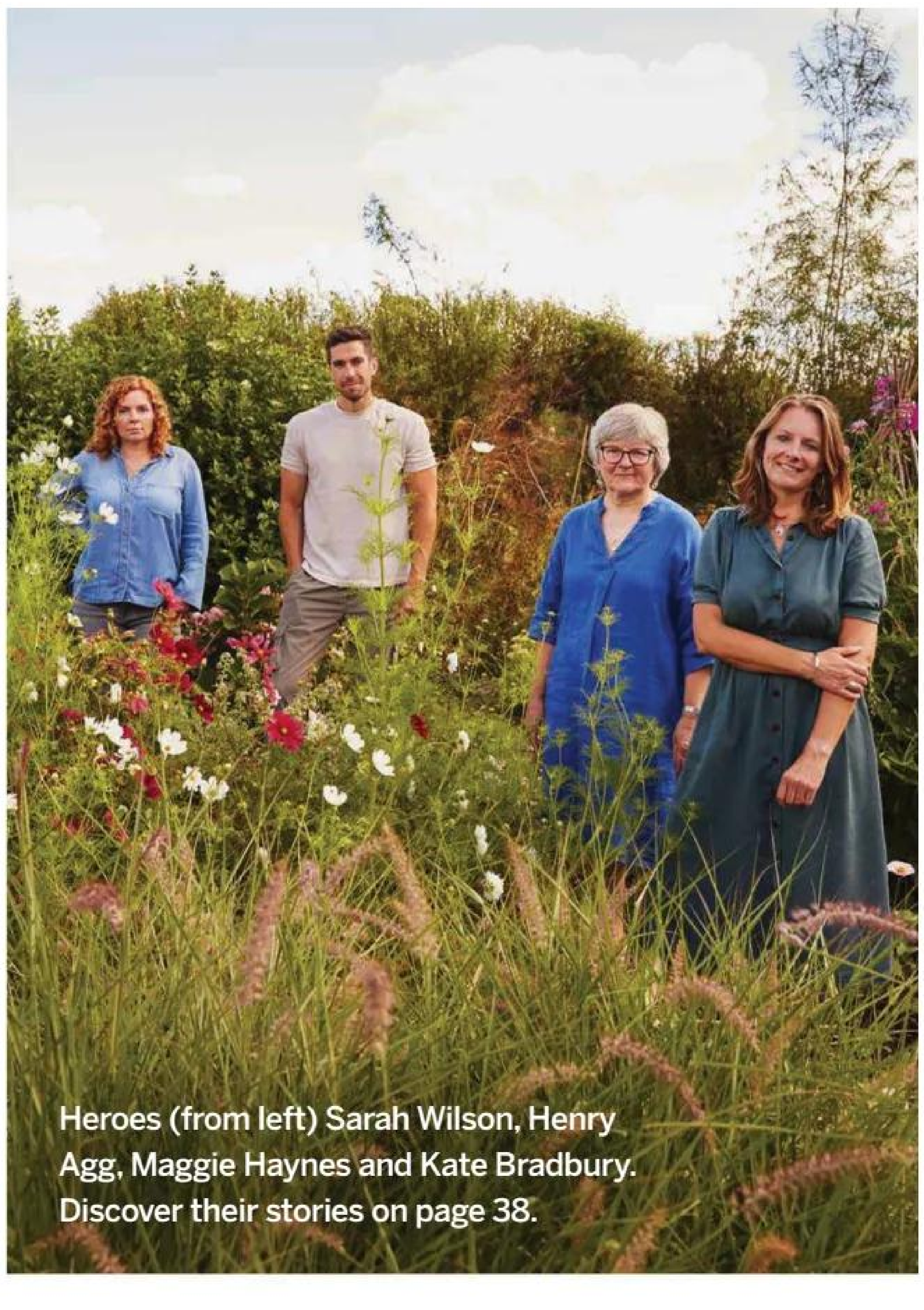
LISA LINDER

Heroes (from left) Sarah Wilson, Henry Agg, Maggie Haynes and Kate Bradbury. Discover their stories on page 38.

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RICHARD BLOOM

The community garden at The Exchange, Erith, with its rich tapestry of layered planting, invites visitors to explore, page 50.

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SEE PAGE 24

COVER IMAGE

Horticultural heroes
From left: Dr Richard Claxton (page 80), Keely Siddiqui Charlick, Thomas Kendall, Mo Kebbay, Sarah Cook, Jim Marshall, John Little and Lee Connelly (page 38). Photograph by Lisa Linder

ON THE COVER

Meet our horticultural heroes, page 38
All together now, pages 50 and 74
Hort healthy, pages 66 and 80

EVENTS AND OFFERS

- Join us for a new series of online talks this autumn with some of the UK's leading experts. Watch live to ask questions or catch up later on demand – page 15
- Save money when you subscribe to the digital edition of *Gardens Illustrated* – page 24

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Lisa Linder
Lisa photographs our cover feature, page 38. *“What a privilege to photograph such an amazing group of gardeners who have given so much, in such inspiring spaces, to local communities.”*

Sid Hill
Sid recommends the best plants to grow for good gut health, page 66. *“I love sharing my passion for edible plants and the microbiome. I hope this article inspires readers to dig deeper.”*

Joshua Sparkes
Joshua charts his journey to natural farming, page 82. *“Natural farming will, I hope, be a way that we can live with nature and protect ecosystems through food growing.”*

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ANDREW MONTGOMERY

ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Charlotte Harris
Charlotte co-founded the values-driven landscape design practice Harris Bugg Studio with Hugo Bugg in 2017. She has won three Gold medals at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, as well as Best Show Garden in 2023.

Fergus Garrett
Fergus was appointed head gardener at Great Dixter by Christopher Lloyd in 1993 and is now CEO of the garden’s Charitable Trust. He was awarded an RHS Associate of Honour in 2008 and an RHS Victoria Medal of Honour in 2019.

James Basson
James lives in the South of France where he runs Scape Design, a practice for creating sustainable landscapes. The winner of four Chelsea Gold medals, he was awarded Best Show Garden in 2017.

Anna Pavord
Anna was *The Independent*’s gardening correspondent for 30 years and is the author of the bestselling book *The Tulip*. In 2000 the RHS awarded her the Veitch Memorial Medal. She lives and gardens in Dorset.

Dan Pearson
Dan is one of the UK’s best-known garden designers. Among his many award-winning gardens is the Tokachi Millennium Forest in Japan. He was awarded an OBE in the 2022 New Year Honours for services to horticulture.

Sarah Price
Sarah is one of the UK’s most sought-after garden designers. She won Gold at Chelsea in 2012, 2018 and 2023, and was GMG Garden Columnist of the Year in 2016 for her design series in *Gardens Illustrated*.

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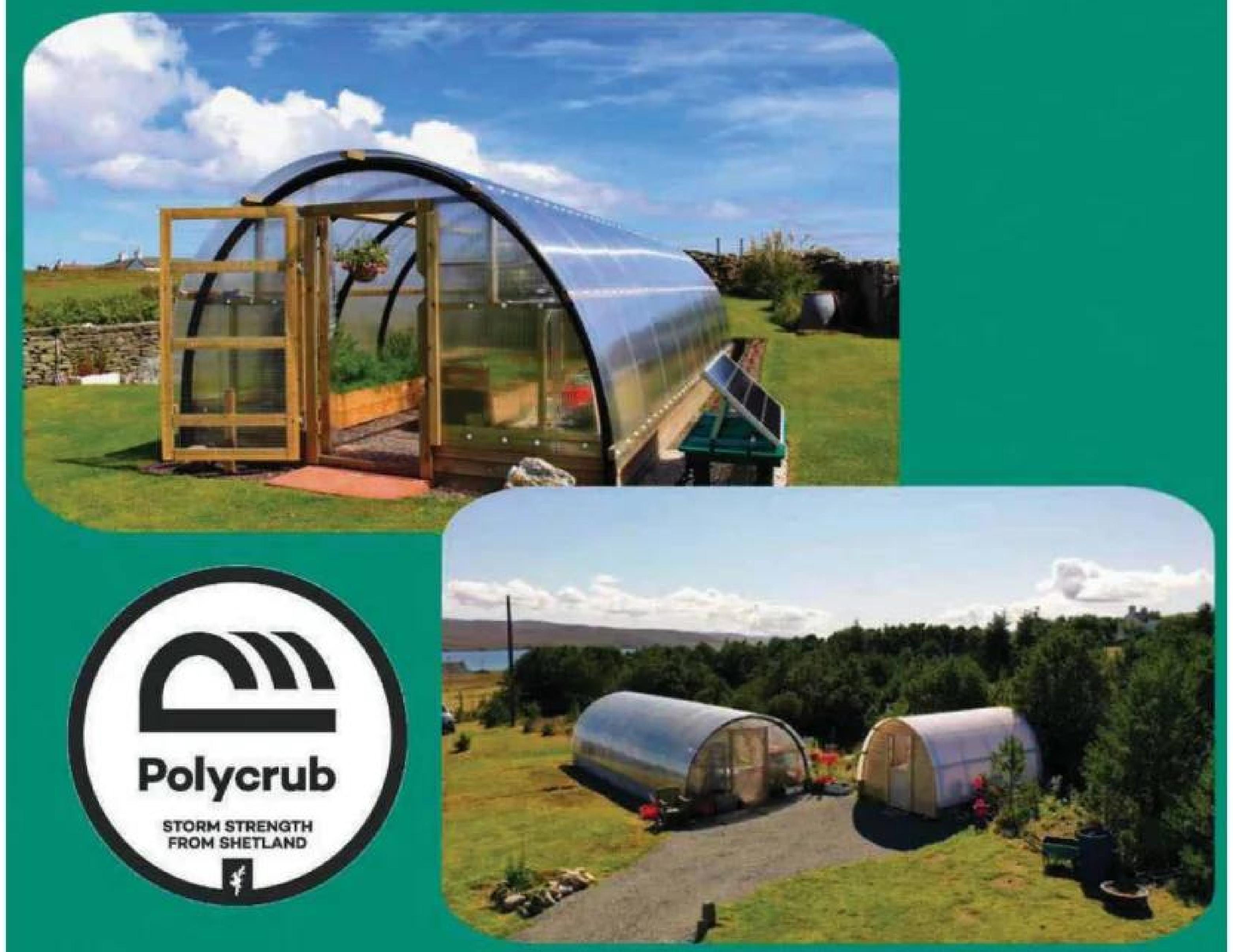

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DIG IN

What's new, what's growing and what's going on this month

NEWS COMPILED BY **MOLLY BLAIR**

NATIONAL Open GARDEN SCHEME
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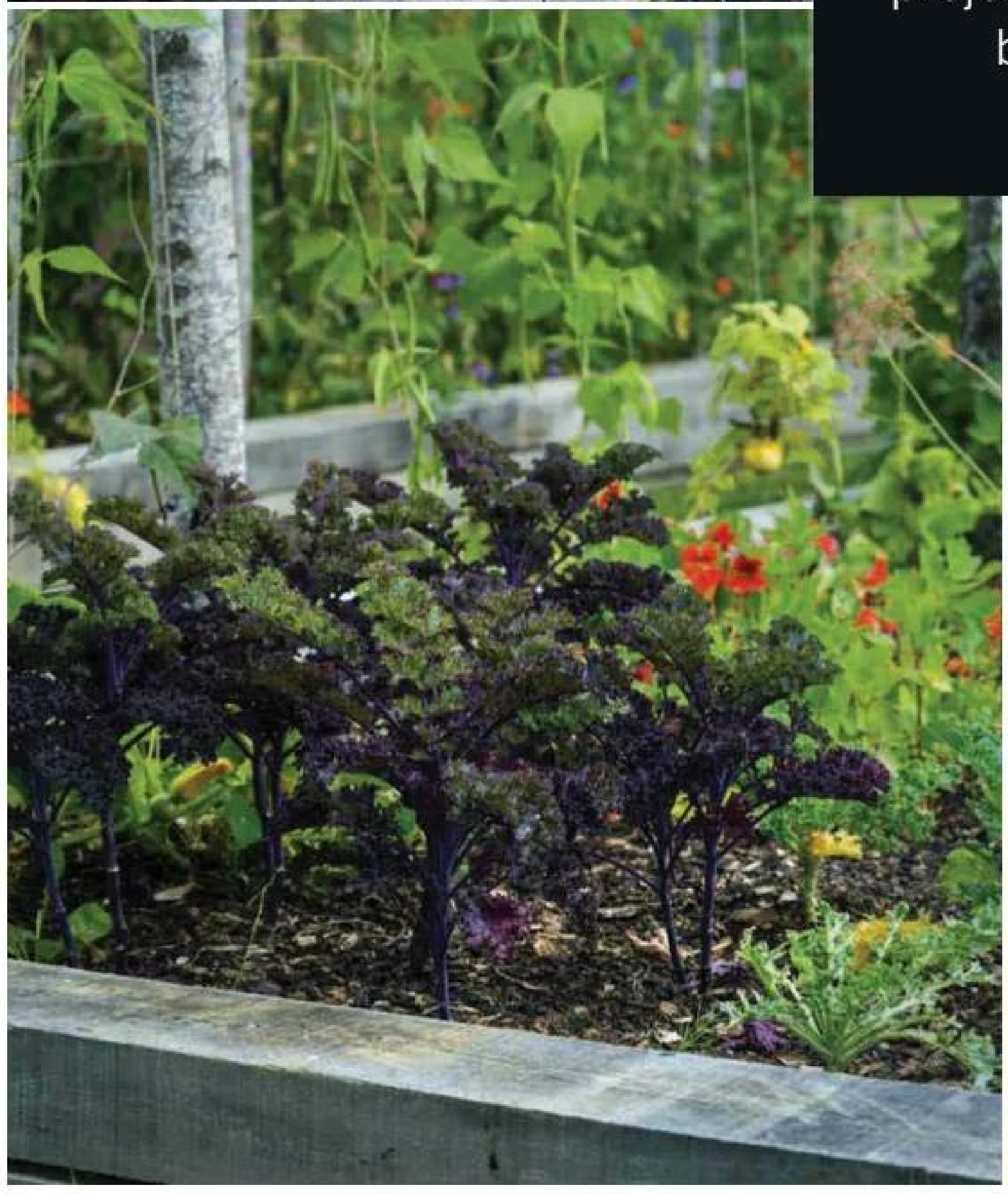
GARDEN GRANTS

GROWING COMMUNITY

The National Garden Scheme (NGS) is inviting applications for its 2025 Community Garden Grants programme. Providing funding to amateur gardeners from community groups in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands, the grants allow people to complete gardens or gardening projects that focus on benefiting the local community or a charitable group. The aim is to bring communities together through a shared space and a love of gardening. In 2024, the NGS funded 89 community projects with grants totalling £232,000 for gardens, allotments, and rehabilitation and regeneration projects. Awards are between £1,000 and £5,000, and are based on individual merit. Submissions close on 28 October at midday. **ngs.org.uk**



JULIE SKELTON

SHE GROWS VEG

Talking point

THE WORST GROWING YEAR EVER?

Any hopes of an autumn reprieve on summer's wild weather were dashed when September rolled around with a mix of cold, rain and sun. There seems to be a consensus: this has been an incredibly difficult year for growers.

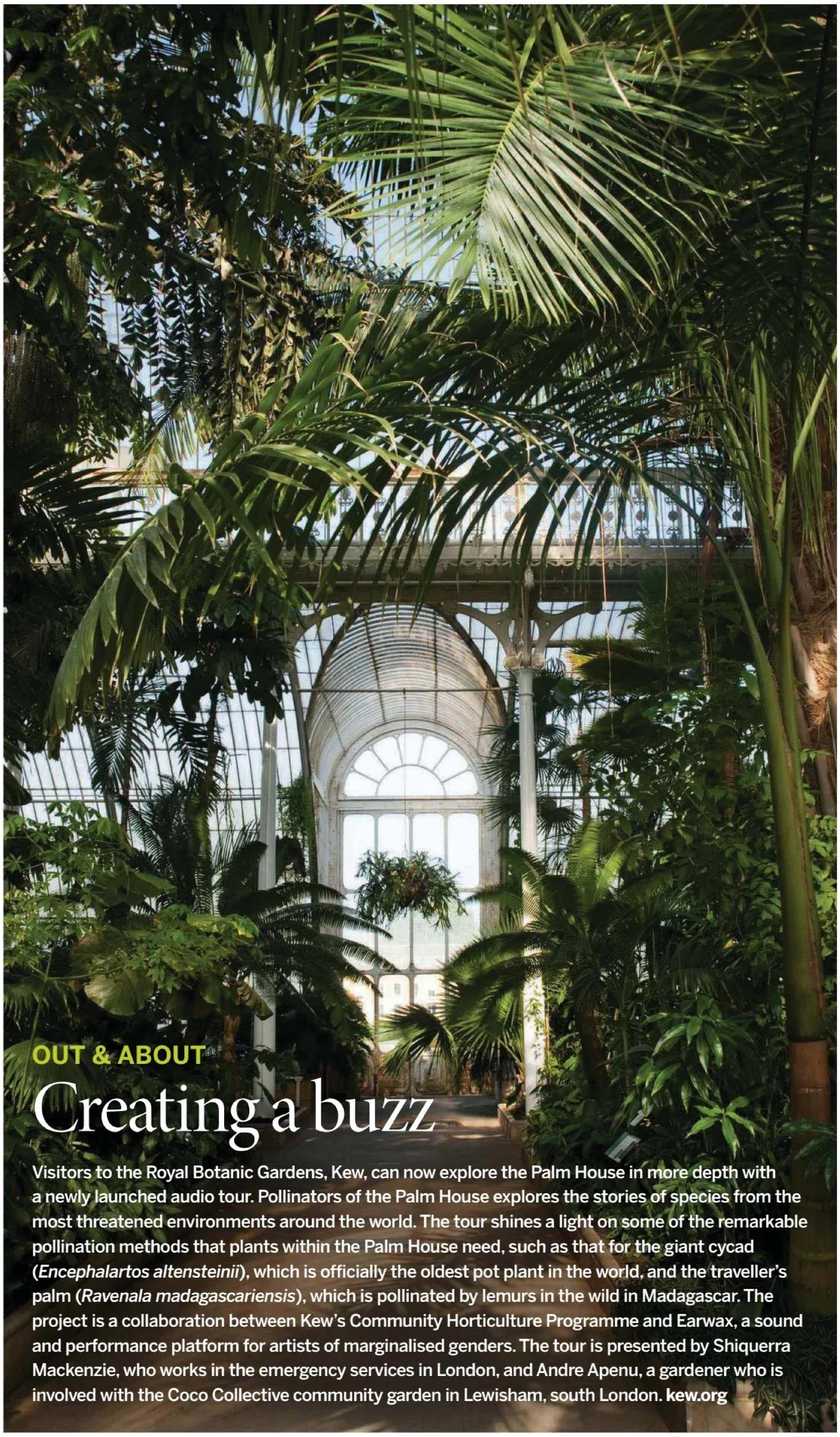
"In 20 years of growing, this has been the toughest season I can remember," says Kate Cotterill (above) of She Grows Veg, an heirloom seed company that she runs with Lucy Hutchings. "We've never had tomatoes running so late and so many false starts on certain crops.

"A combination of a very late summer and less sun, with a much later last frost and sustained low temperatures into late May, has meant that many plants have struggled. It was also a wet early season which made growing harder and was the perfect habitat for slugs."

We took to social media to see if our audience has had a similarly difficult year. On Instagram, 80 per cent of respondents agreed, with rain and slugs being cited as two of the big challenges.

Unpredictable seasons are likely to become the norm with climate change, so we asked Kate what advice she would give to gardeners to adapt. "See gardening as a giant experiment every year," she says. "No two years will be the same. When selecting veg seeds, create a resilient and diverse garden by choosing many different varieties, which will improve your chances of a decent harvest. We propagate and sow too much of everything, so we have replacements at hand if we need them. We sow some for nature and some for us."

To find out more about growing issues this year, scan the QR code or visit **gardensillustrated.com/ worstgrowingyear**



JEFF EDEN © RBG KEW

OUT & ABOUT

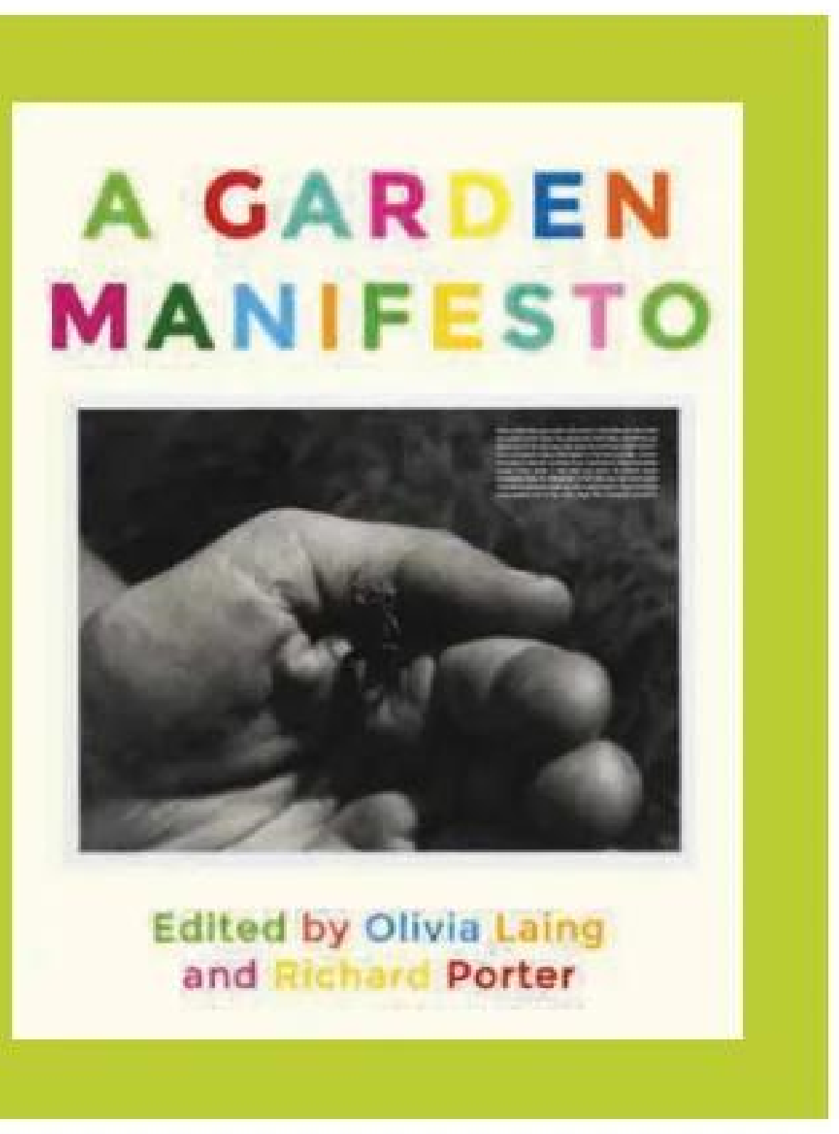
Creating a buzz

Visitors to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, can now explore the Palm House in more depth with a newly launched audio tour. Pollinators of the Palm House explores the stories of species from the most threatened environments around the world. The tour shines a light on some of the remarkable pollination methods that plants within the Palm House need, such as that for the giant cycad (*Encephalartos altensteinii*), which is officially the oldest pot plant in the world, and the traveller's palm (*Ravenala madagascariensis*), which is pollinated by lemurs in the wild in Madagascar. The project is a collaboration between Kew's Community Horticulture Programme and Earwax, a sound and performance platform for artists of marginalised genders. The tour is presented by Shiquerra Mackenzie, who works in the emergency services in London, and Andre Apenu, a gardener who is involved with the Coco Collective community garden in Lewisham, south London. kew.org

BOOK

A vision for the future

Jonny Bruce, Alys Fowler and Jamaica Kincaid are among the garden thinkers featured in *A Garden Manifesto*, a new book that asks what gardens mean and how they can change the world. Exploring radical visions from artists, writers, gardeners and activists, it is packed with ideas of resistance and creation. *A Garden Manifesto* costs £20 plus postage and packaging, and is available from **pilotpress.co.uk**



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PLANTS

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Petersham Nurseries has launched its first ever range of spring bulbs this year, inspired by the cutting garden at its Richmond home. The new range is a collaboration with bulb specialist Taylors of Lincolnshire and centres around narcissi and tulips, along with a variety of other spring-flowering bulbs. Alongside single varieties the range also includes three Cutting Garden collections containing a curated mix of bulbs designed to offer colour throughout spring. Prices for single varieties start at £6.50, while the Cutting Garden collections cost £25 for around 40 bulbs. **petershamnurseries.com**

COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

GREEN CONNECTIONS

Environmental charity Hubbub has launched a free-to-join Community Nature Network to support community-led green spaces through funding opportunities, free resources, guidance and peer-to-peer support. Anyone involved in setting up or running a community-led green space is welcome to join, and members have access to resources such as videos and case studies as well as measurement guides and communications templates. In the lead-up to the launch, Hubbub supported 26 community nature projects across the UK, with sponsorship from Bentley Environmental Charity. **communitynaturenetwork.org.uk**

HUBBUB

What to do this month

VIKKI RIMMER

8 & 15 OCTOBER

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A masterclass on planting daffodils, over two Tuesdays. 11.30am-12.30pm. Free with garden entry (£18.35). Hever Castle, Hever, Kent TN8 7NG. **hevercastle.co.uk**

JULIAN WINSLOW

18 OCTOBER

Nature as Nurture

A talk and Q&A with Arit Anderson on why gardens are essential for health. 2.45pm-4pm. £28. Sissinghurst Castle Gardens, Biddenden Road, nr Cranbrook, Kent TN17 2AB. Tel 01580 710700 **nationaltrust.org.uk**

26 OCTOBER

Pumpkins, Tendrils and a little Chiaroscuro

Join a one-day art workshop focused on drawing pumpkins, with artist Jacky Mills. 10am-4pm. £120. Caisson Gardens, Combe Hay, Bath, Somerset BA2 7EF. **caissongardens.com**

DESIGN

ROSE REVIVAL

Scone Palace in Perth, Scotland, is collaborating with rose breeder David Austin Roses to redevelop its iconic walled gardens. As part of the overall revival project, the garden team will create two new rose gardens, the first of this will be completed this winter with the addition of pergolas and obelisks for training the climbing roses. Fifty types of rose have already been planted, filling the walled garden with colour and scent. The project will breathe new life into this under-used area of the gardens, adding a new space for visitors to explore at the 220-year-old historic palace. **scone-palace.co.uk**

SCONE PALACE

TECHNOLOGY

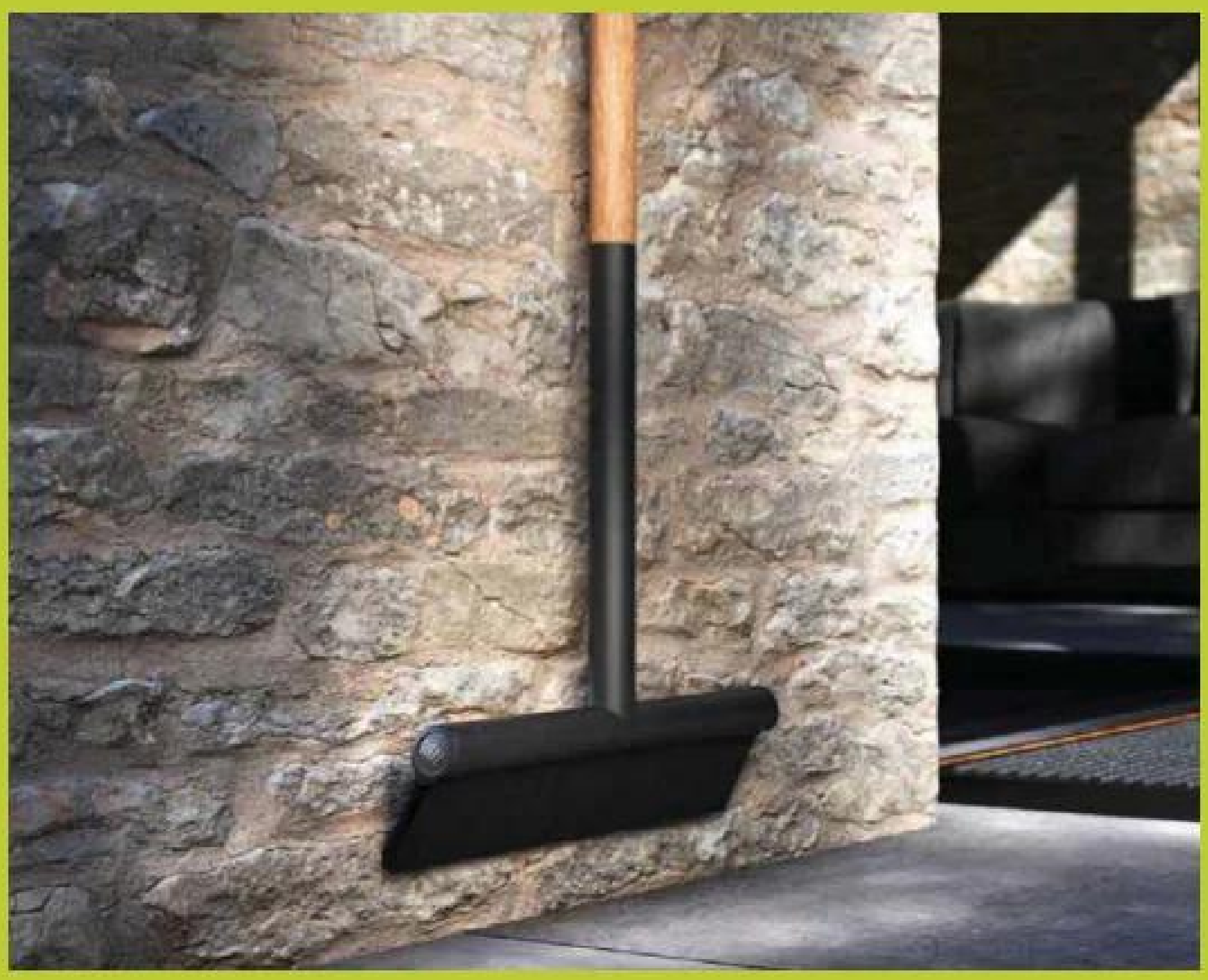
Accessibility app

Saltram in Plymouth has become the first National Trust site to trial NaviLens technology to help partially sighted people navigate its gardens. The free app promotes greater independence and freedom by enabling users to navigate spaces with minimal or no assistance. The trial will last until 25 October, and the Trust will evaluate the results with the hope of improving access to heritage and nature at Saltram. **nationaltrust.org.uk**

NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES / SARAH ELMES

3 FOR THE GARDEN…

GARDEN BROOMS



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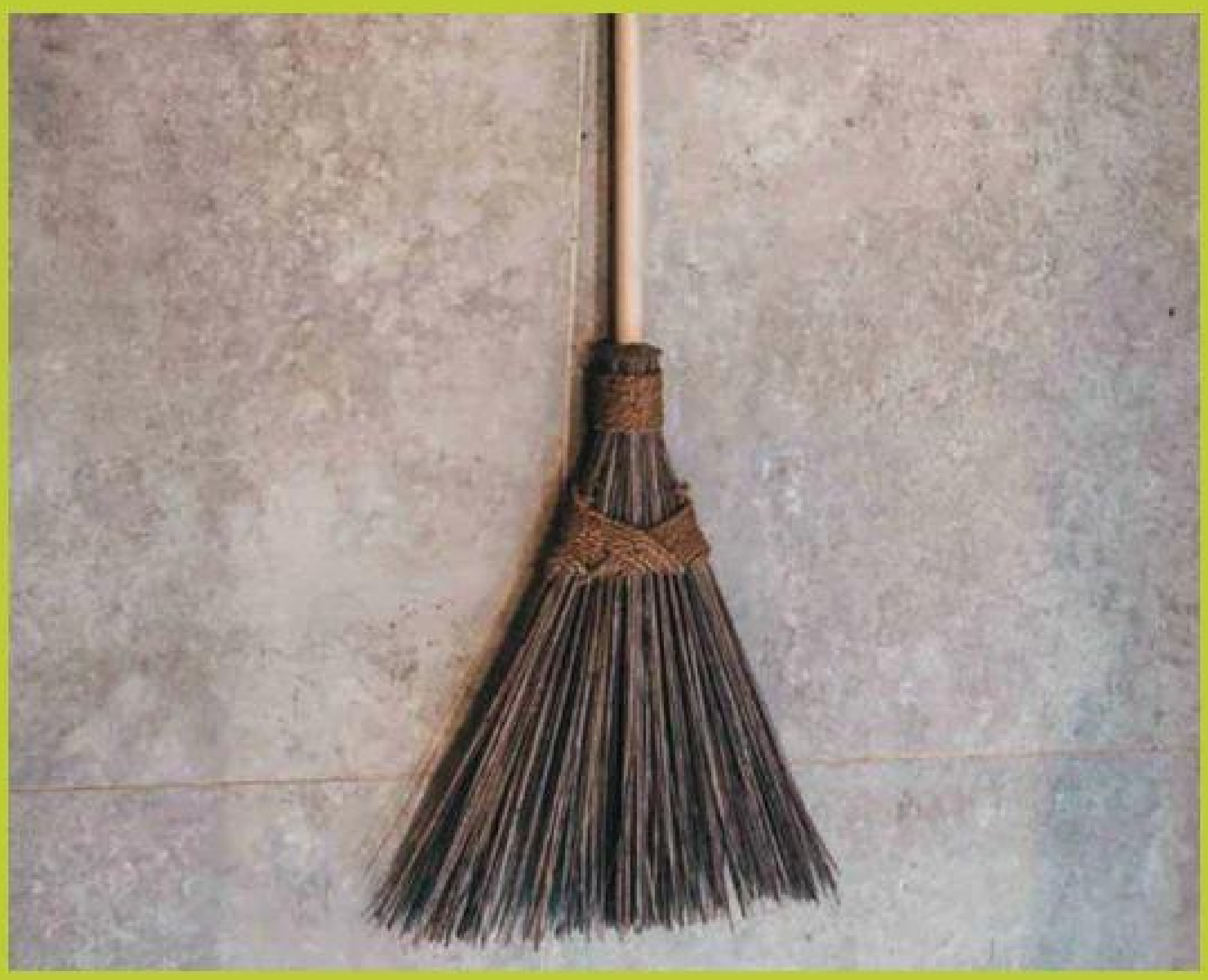

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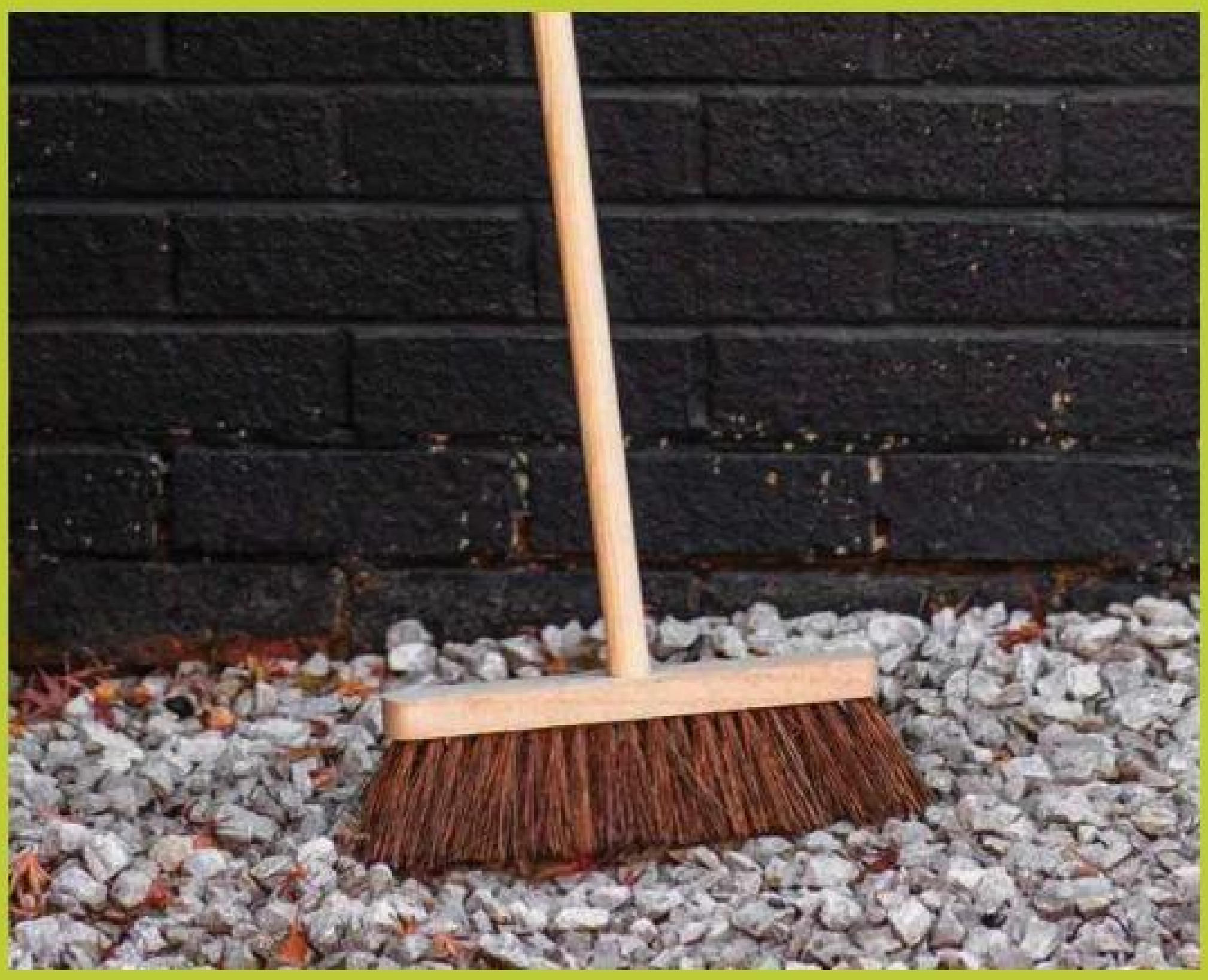

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JOHN CAMPBELL, ALISTER THORPE, RICHARD BLOOM

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VERNONIA ARKANSANA

This sturdy perennial has stiff stems and willow-like green foliage. It produces beautiful, fluffy, pink-purple flowers arranged in loose, flat-topped clusters, which are very attractive to butterflies. While this giant may appear a bit coarse, it is tough and ideal for a naturalistic planting scheme or at the back of a border. I have grown it in various climates and have not had to stake it. To propagate in spring, slice off emerging side shoots or sow in autumn to overwinter in a cold frame.

Height and spread 2m x 1m.
Origin Northern to central USA.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, humus-rich soil; full sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b†.
Season of interest September – November.

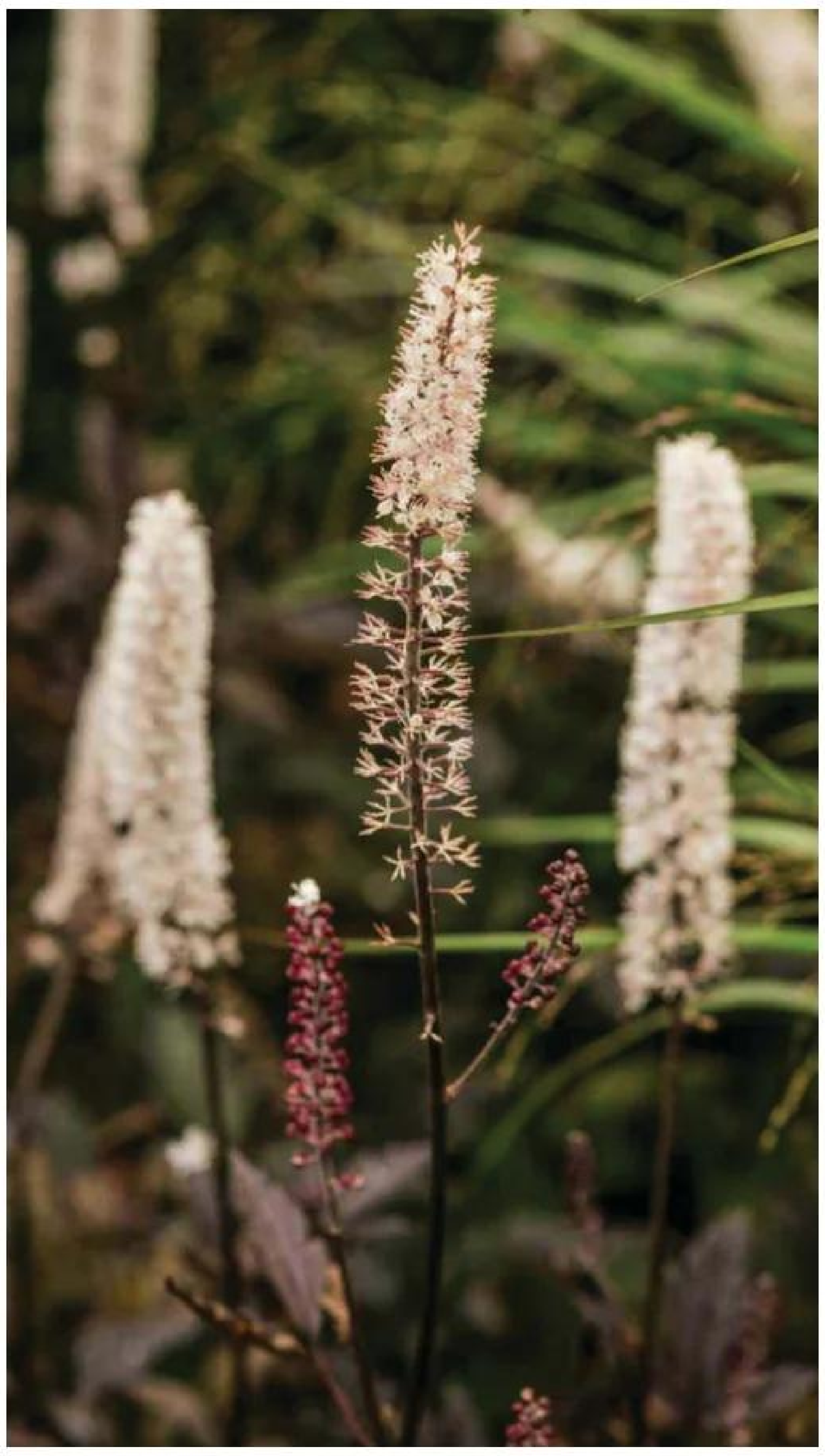
CLICK HERE to watch our video, and discover wh *Vernonia arkansana* is Andrea's plant of the month.

Andrea Brunsendorf is head gardener at Lowther Castle & Gardens in Cumbria **lowthercastle.org**

October plants

Andrea Brunsendorf savours autumn beauties including a long-flowering, pale-pink rose, an ethereal lemon-yellow sunflower and a curious orange-seeded spindle tree

PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MAYBURY



ACTAEA SIMPLEX (ATROPURPUREA GROUP) 'JAMES COMPTON'

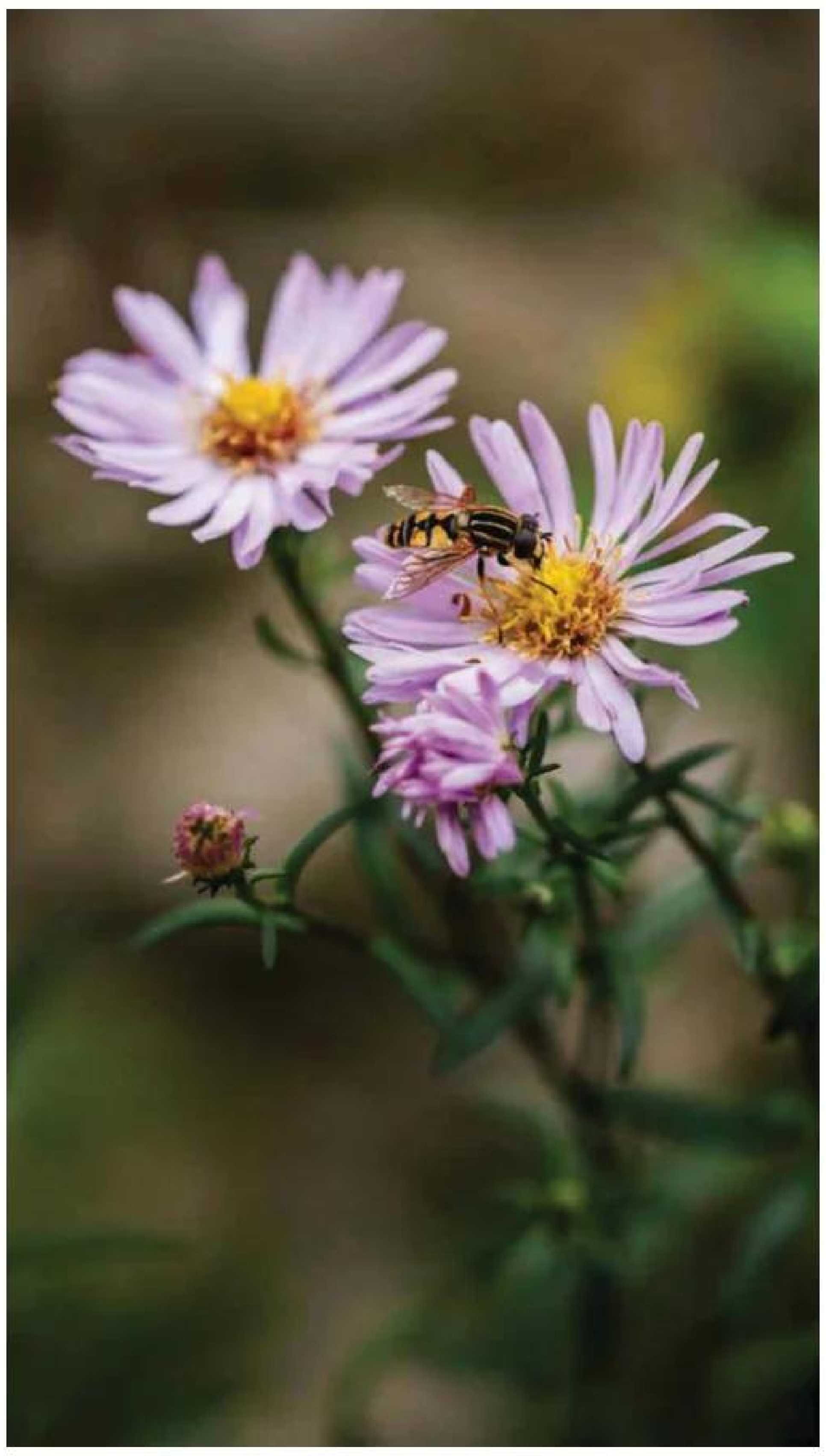
This slow-to-establish but attractive perennial, with its purplish-black divided foliage, is always a talking point. Numerous purplish buds borne on stiff flower spikes open to fragrant, cream-white flowers. The fluffy spikes also appeal to pollinators. Plant en masse for best effect. Makes a striking combination with the white allium 'Mount Everest'. AGM*.

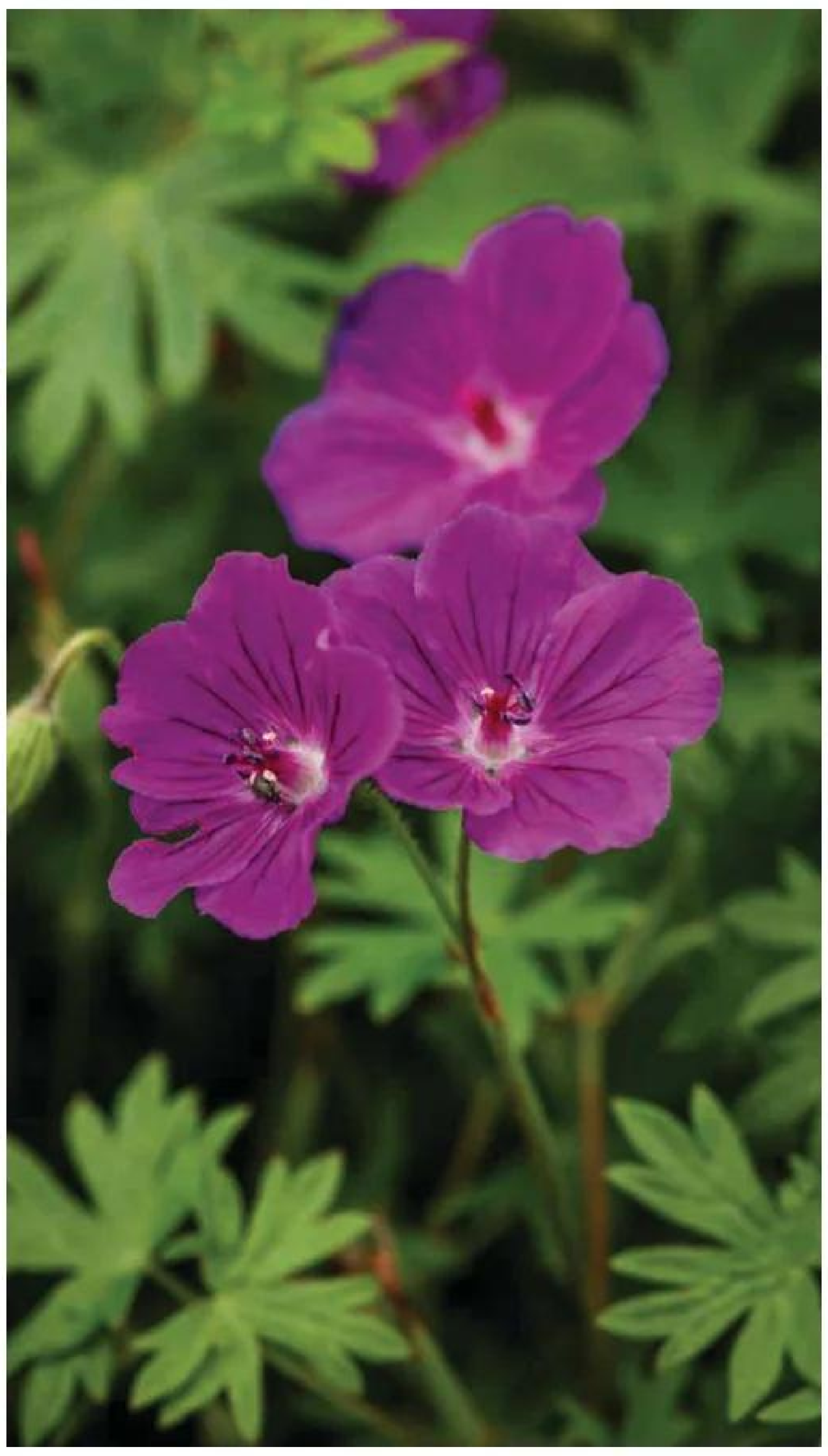
Height and spread 1.7m x 60cm.
Origin Garden origin (species western to northeastern China, Japan, Korea, Siberia to far east of Russia).
Conditions Moist, well- to poorly drained, humus-rich soil; part shade, but will tolerate sunnier positions.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 3a-8b.
Season of interest Foliage April – October; flowers late August – October.

SYMPHYOTRICHUM LAEVE 'LES MOUTIERS'

Loose sprays of pale-pink, daisy-like flowers contrast beautifully with the dark, nearly black, willowy stems and foliage. It was the first perennial I planted when I moved north, having grown it for many years in southern parts of the UK. It still performs well in the shorter, cooler growing season and perhaps because it grows more robustly up here, I have not needed to stake it. It has excellent mildew resistance and is a vigorous spreader. Divide every three to five years.

Height and spread 1.8m x 1m.
Origin Garden origin (species eastern and central USA and Canada).
Conditions Moist, well-drained, humus-rich soil; full sun. Tolerates some drought.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.
Season of interest Flowers mid-September – November.





GERANIUM 'TINY MONSTER'

A vigorous, fuss-free perennial that forms dense cushions, smattering the ground with its deeply cut foliage, which turns a striking red in autumn. Its large, magenta flowers, marked with dark veins, bloom for an extremely long season. We grow it along the Tapestry Parterre's edges, where it serves pollinators as a reliable food source while creating spontaneous and vibrant colour combinations as it mingles with yellow clouds of *Alchemilla mollis* and other flowering plants.

Height and spread 30cm x 50cm.
Origin Hybrid of *G. sanguineum* x *G. psilostemon*.
Conditions Moist but well-drained soil; full sun to part shade. Tolerates some drought.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 4a-8b.
Season of interest Flowers May – November; autumn foliage from October.

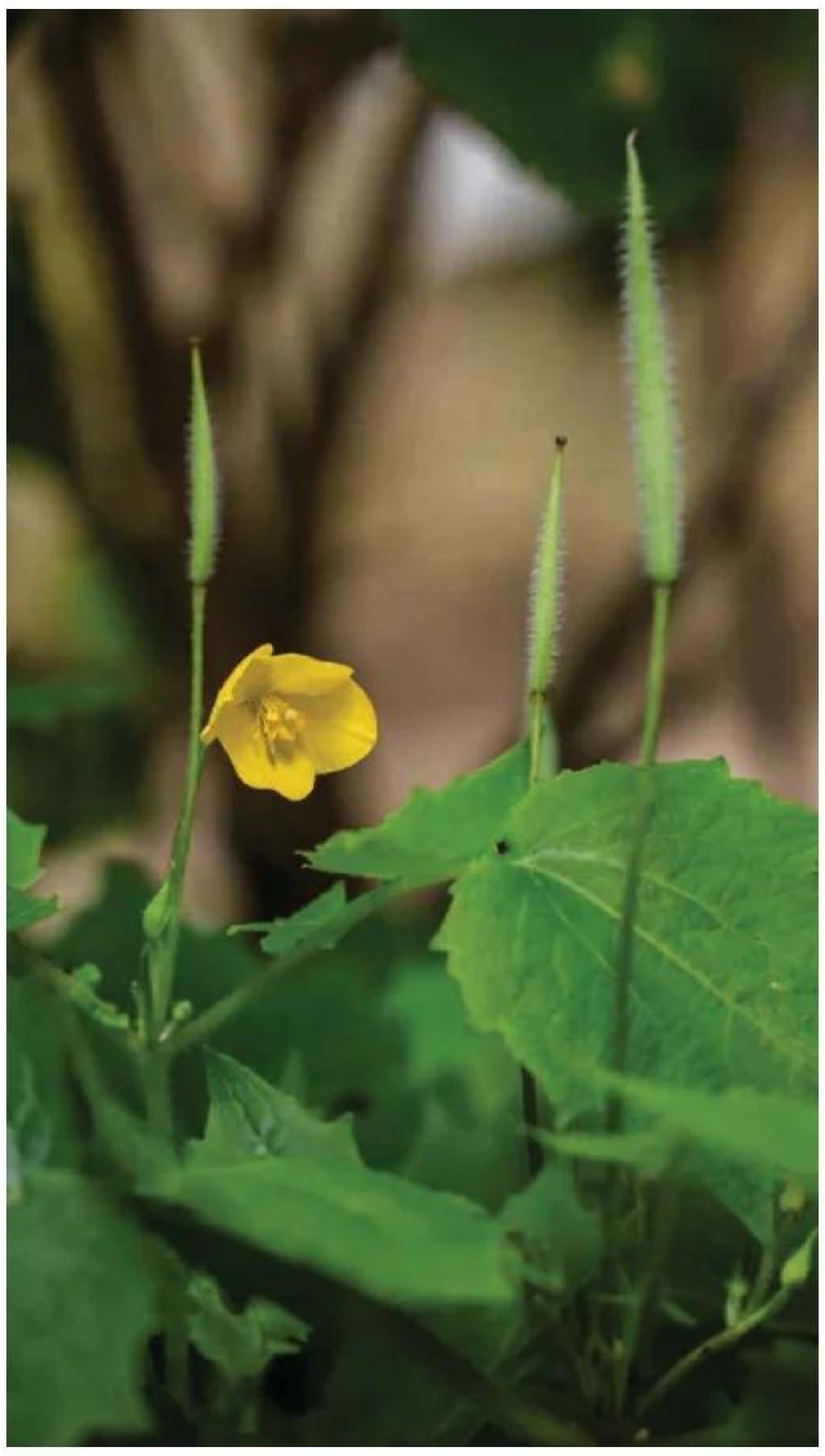
*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. †Hardiness ratings given where available.

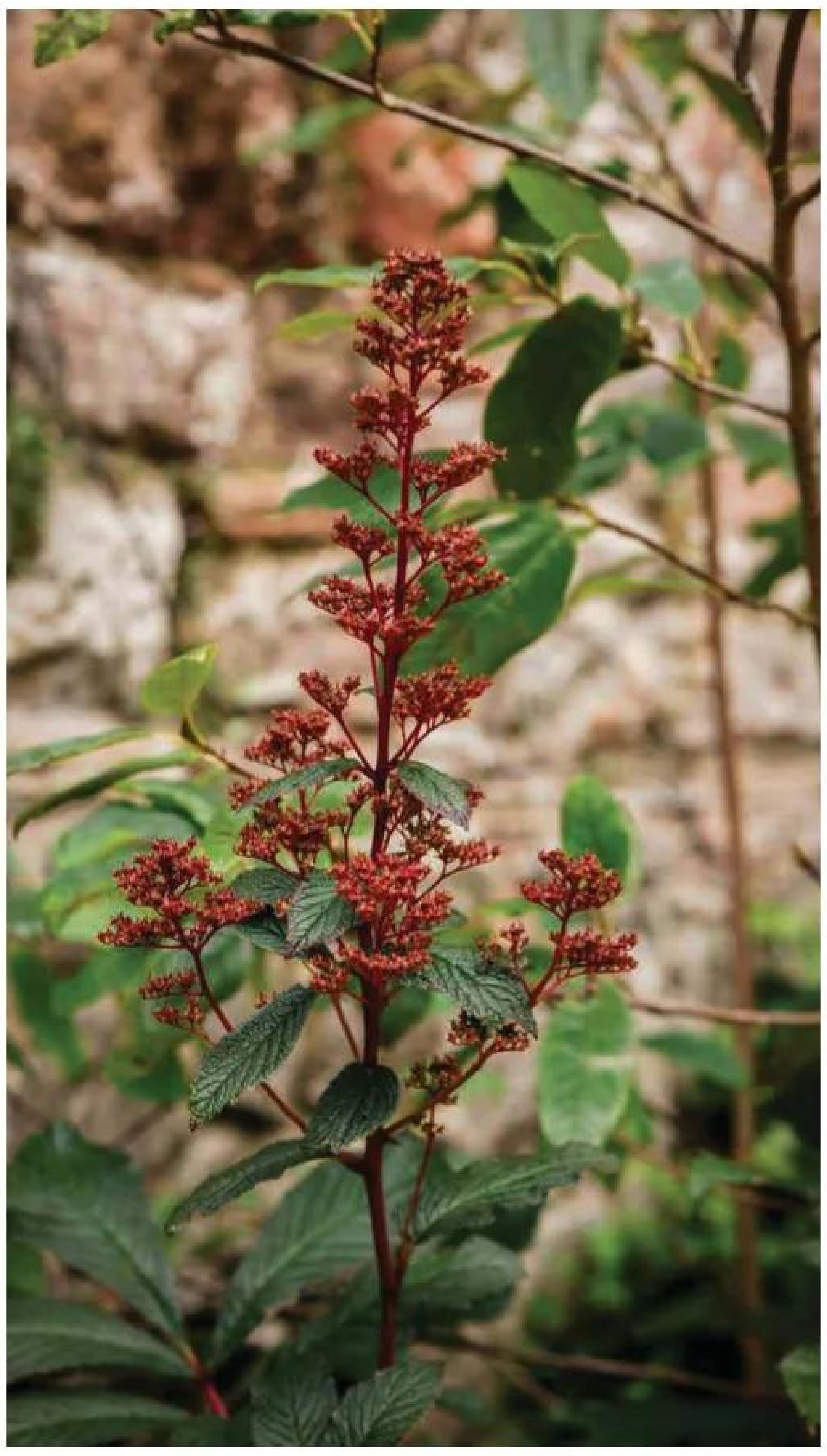
The resemblance of *Sanguisorba* 'Cangshan Cranberry' to a profusion of autumn raspberries may be why I find this plant so appealing

STYLOPHORUM LASIOCARPUM

A biennial to short-lived perennial poppy that lights up the darkest corner of the garden into mid-autumn. From a basal rosette, one or two branched flowering stems arise, holding clear, yellow-cupped flowers that turn into oblong seed capsules covered in silvery soft hairs. It will self-seed when happy. It is also a brittle plant; keep it away from path edges and very exposed sites where leaves and stems can get easily bruised. It is an elegant woodlander that favours the cool north.

Height and spread 50cm x 40cm.
Origin Central China.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, humus-rich soil; sun to part shade. Tolerates dry shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 4a-9b.
Season of interest Flowers May – October; seedheads from July onwards.





RODGERSIA PINNATA 'SUPERBA'

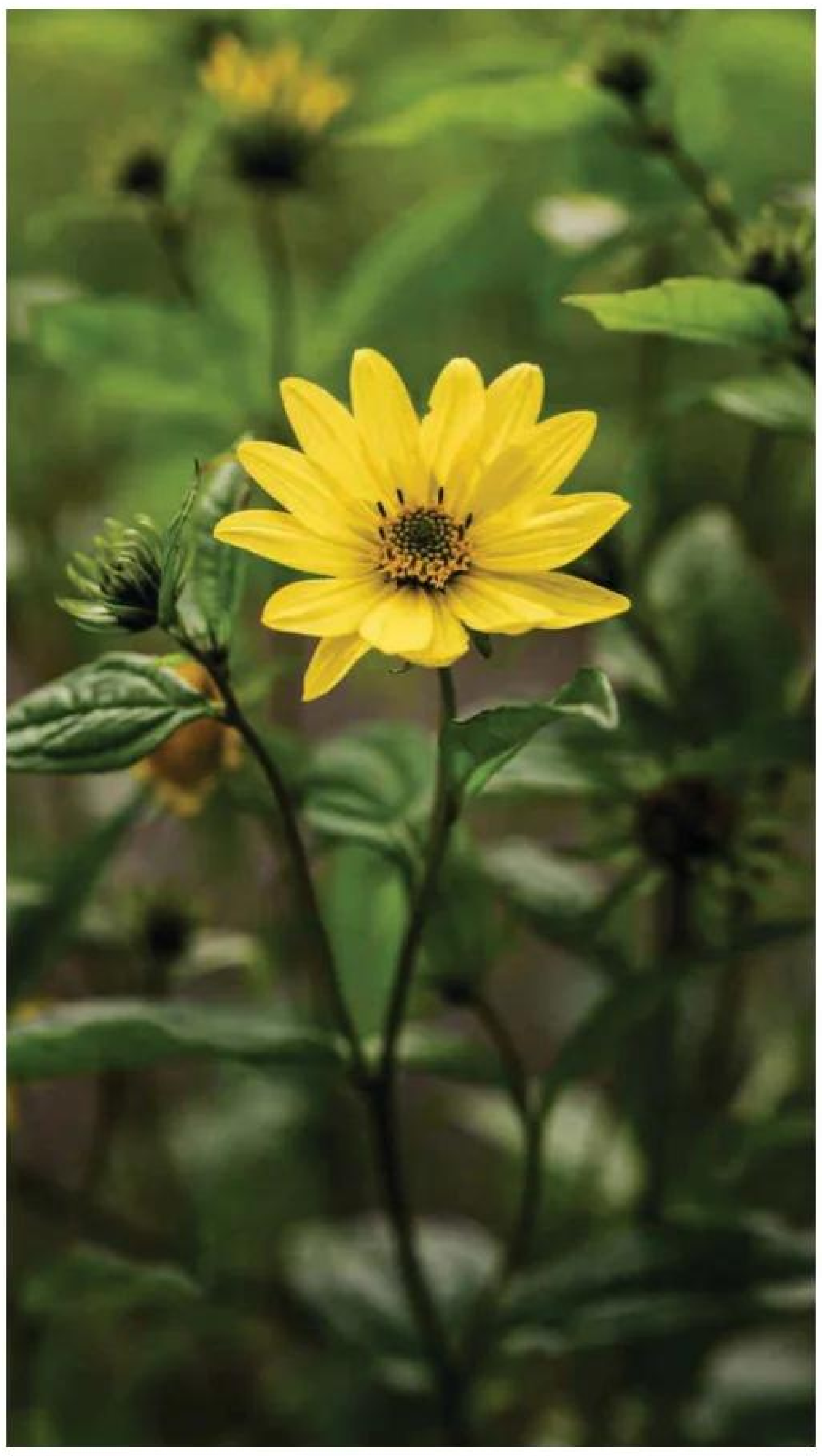
A robust perennial with large, deeply divided leaves, ranging from deep green with bronze-tinged edges to purplish-bronze. Pairs well with fine-textured shade plants such as sedges or ferns. The bright, rose-pink, star-shaped flowers form long-stalked plumes, turning nearly red as the season progresses. By summer's end, striking, rich-brown seedheads last into winter if protected from the wind. Once they have established, you can divide the slowly spreading rhizomes in spring. AGM.

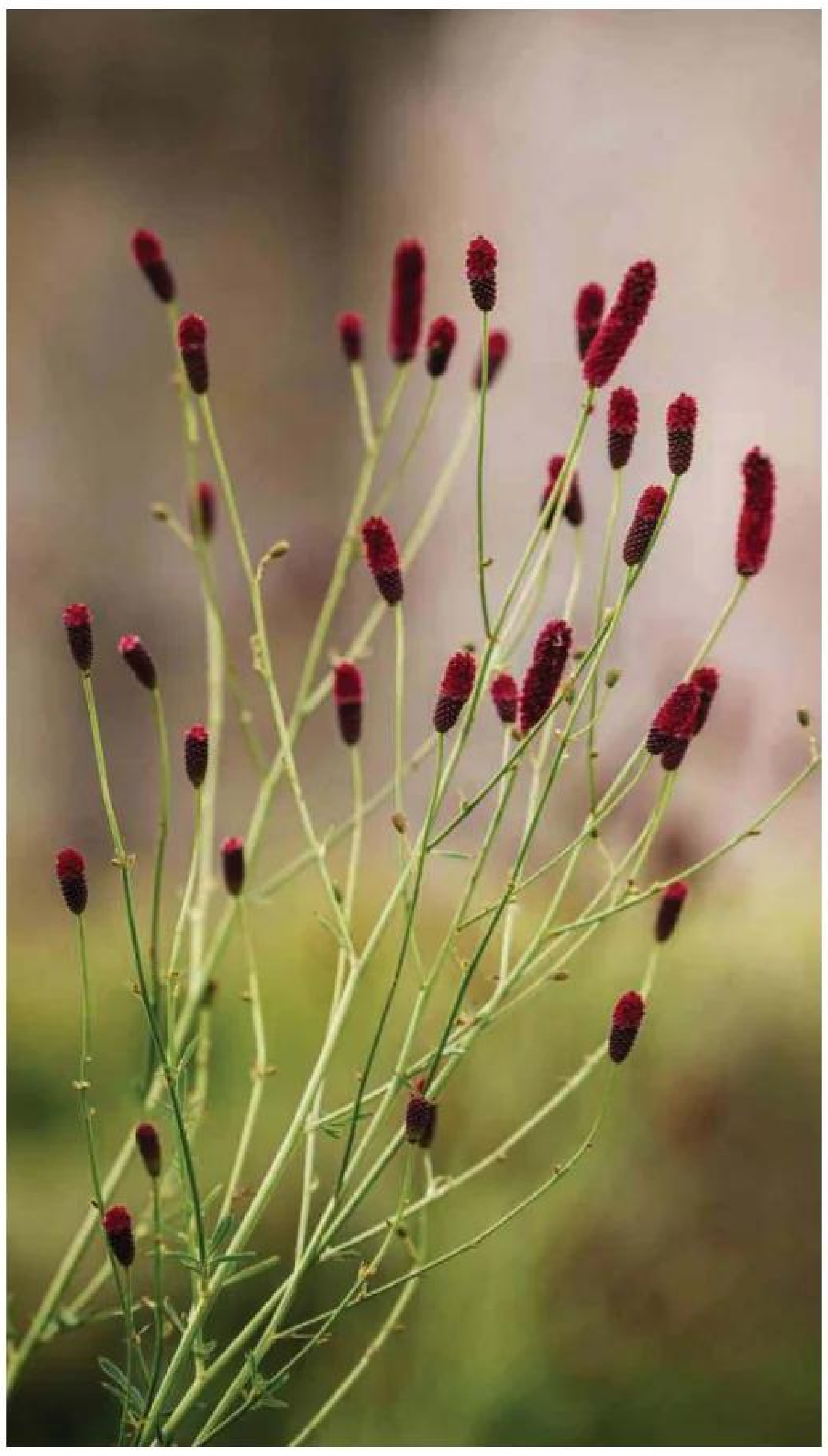
Height and spread 1.5m x 1m.
Origin Garden (species China to Myanmar).
Conditions Moist, well- to poorly drained soil; shade to part shade, but will tolerate full sun in wet soils.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.
Season of interest Flowers May – July; seedheads from August onwards.

HELIANTHUS 'LEMON QUEEN'

This robust perennial sunflower has an upright, bushy habit with coarse, dark-green foliage. Initially, its flowering can be a bit underwhelming, but once it gains momentum, numerous small, saucer-shaped, pale-yellow ray flowers are held on top of tall, slender stems. This naturally occurring hybrid is not at all imposing; it spreads slowly and is excellent at the front or back of the border, although it might need a little support. This lemony beauty makes a good cut flower and is also loved by pollinators. AGM.

Height and spread 2m x 1m.
Origin Central USA.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, humus-rich soil; full sun.
Hardiness RHS H4, USDA 5a-9b.
Season of interest Flowers mid-August – October.





SANGUISORBA 'CANGSHAN CRANBERRY'

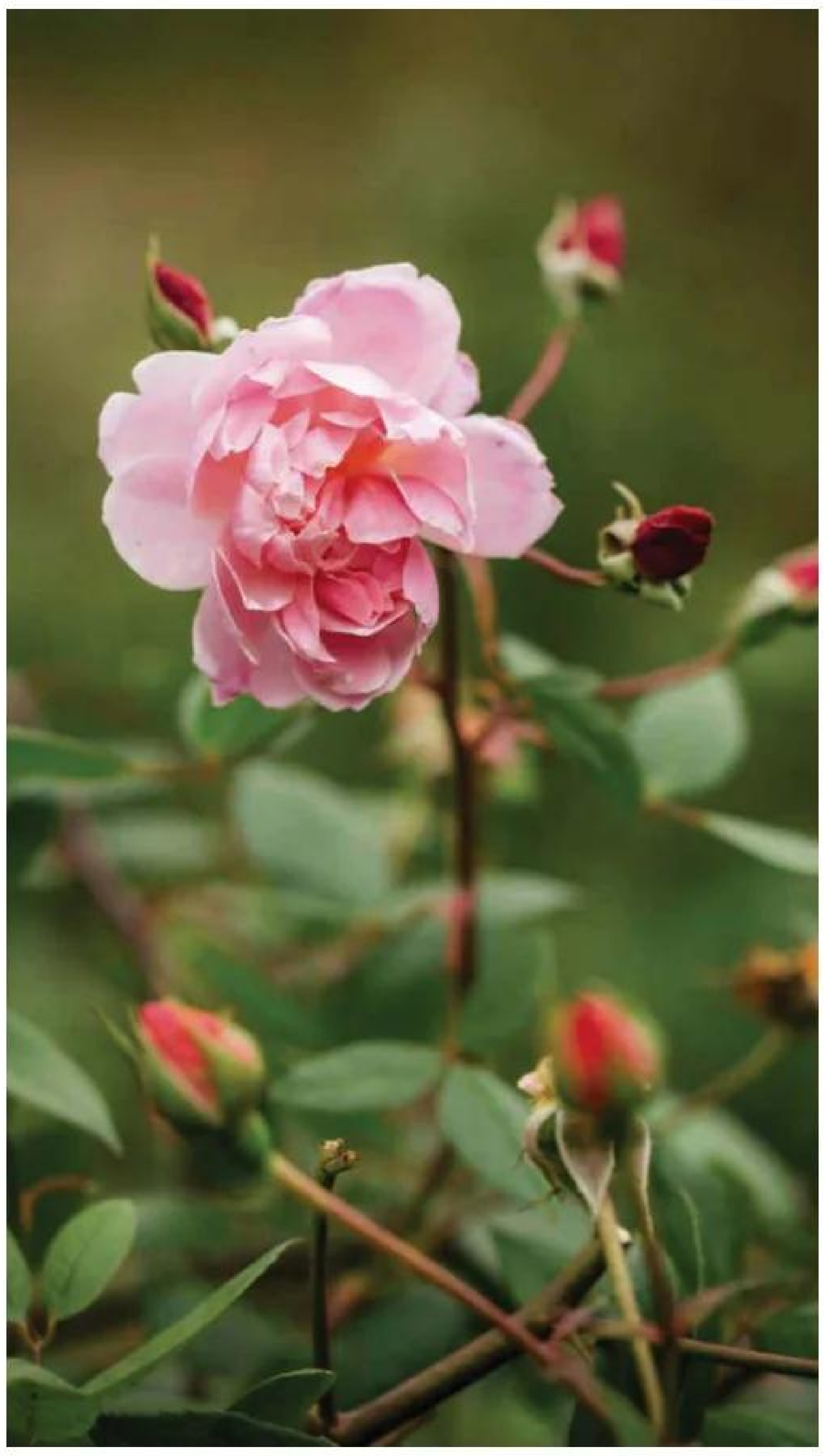
The plantsman Dan Hinkley introduced this stately, captivating, clump-forming perennial. Attractive, dark-burgundy, catkin-like flowers are carried elegantly on tall, slender stems rising from a mound of mid-green pinnate leaves with jagged edges. The resemblance to a profusion of autumn raspberries may be why I find it so appealing. Generally self-supporting, it will benefit from light staking in very exposed sites and requires protection from rabbits. AGM.

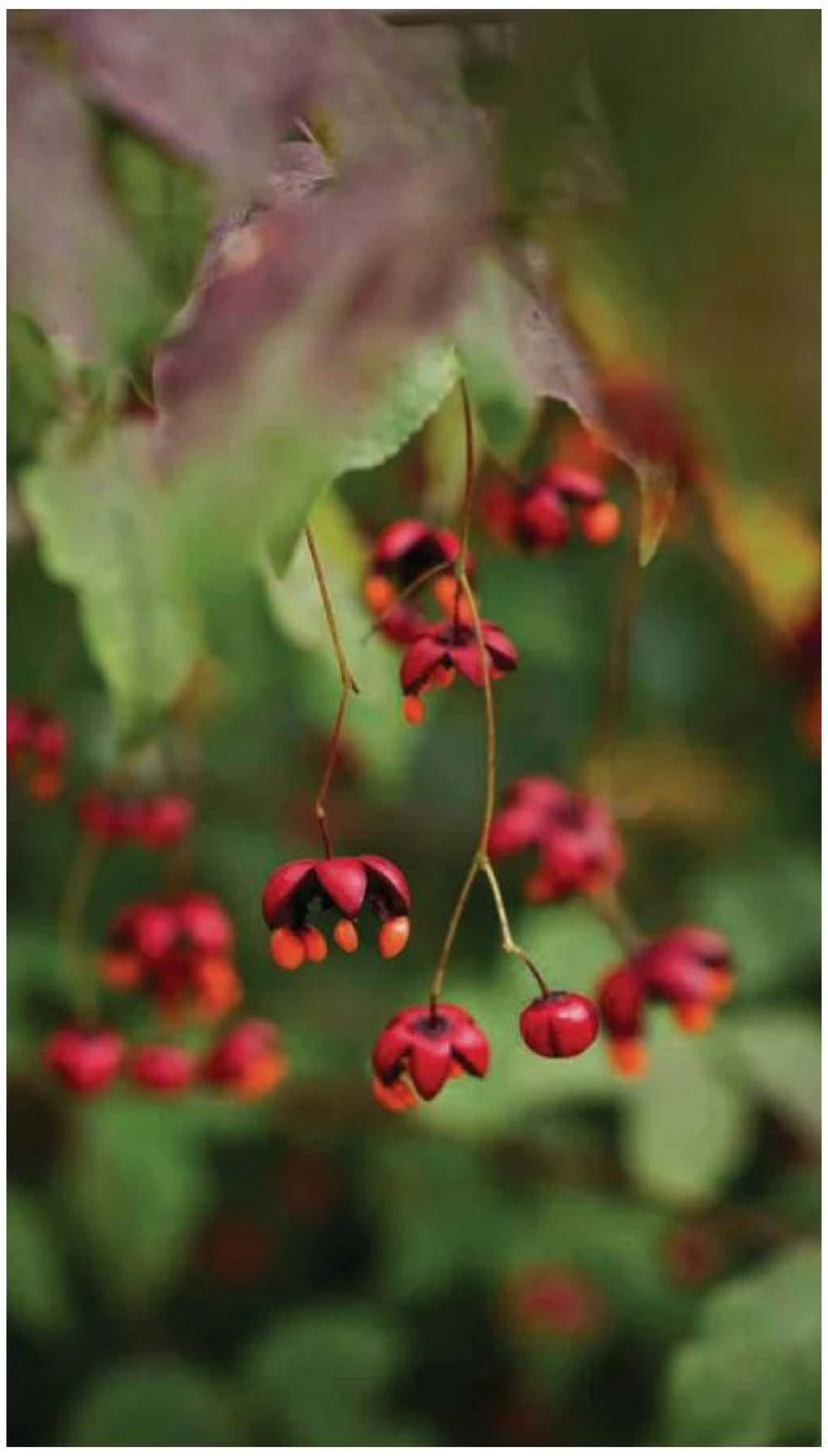
Height and spread 2m x 60cm.
Origin Yunnan, China.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, fertile soils; sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 4a-8b.
Season of interest Flowers August – October; plant structure remains throughout winter.

ROSA MARY DELANY (= 'AUSORTS')

This is the first rose I fell for, and I am still very much in love with it – just as much as I was on that first day. It is a versatile and delicate rose that can be grown either as a shrub or a climber, and its slender, dark stems are almost thornless. Sprays of loosely double, light-pink, scented flowers in the form of shallow cups repeat right into the cold weather, and the pretty, pointed buds are still beautiful even as the blooms get smaller. It is the healthiest shrub rose we grow in our cool and wet climate. AGM.

Height and spread 4m x 1m.
Origin Garden origin.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, rich, fertile soil; full sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 5a-9b.
Season of interest May – November.





EUONYMUS PLANIPES

An unusual, handsome shrub with long, elliptical leaves that turn brilliant red in autumn. The small, green, slightly inconspicuous flowers transform into almost spherical, lobed, scarlet fruits that, when split open, show off the orange seed that seems to hang on an invisible string. This deciduous woody plant is rarely seen; I am growing it for the first time in my long career in the Lowther Castle ruin, a garden designed by Dan Pearson. It requires no (or just minimal) pruning, and only thrives in well-drained soils.

Height and spread 3m x 3m.
Origin Northeast Asia.
Conditions Moist but well-drained soil; full sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.
Season of interest Flowers April – May; foliage mid-September – mid-November.

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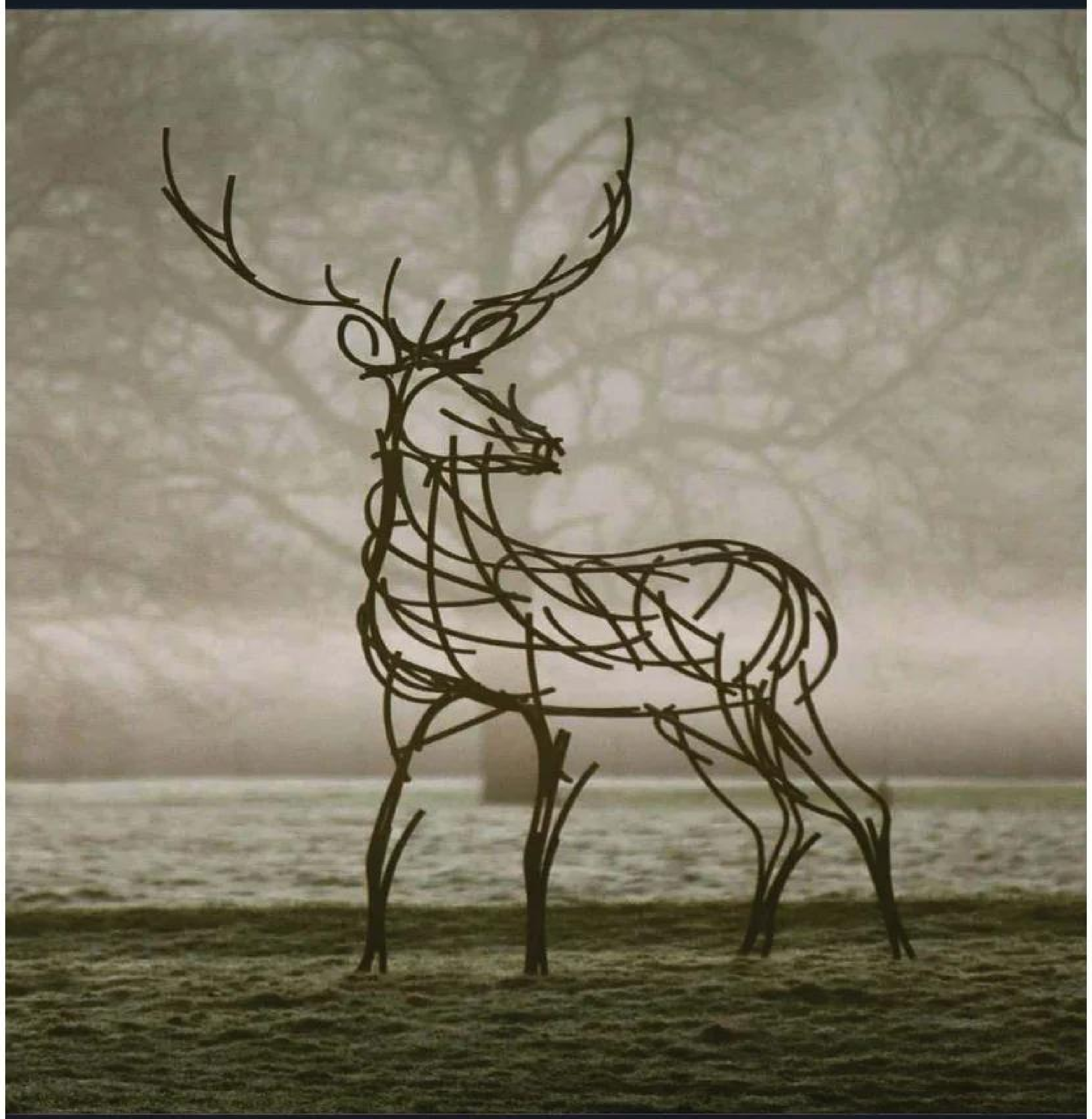

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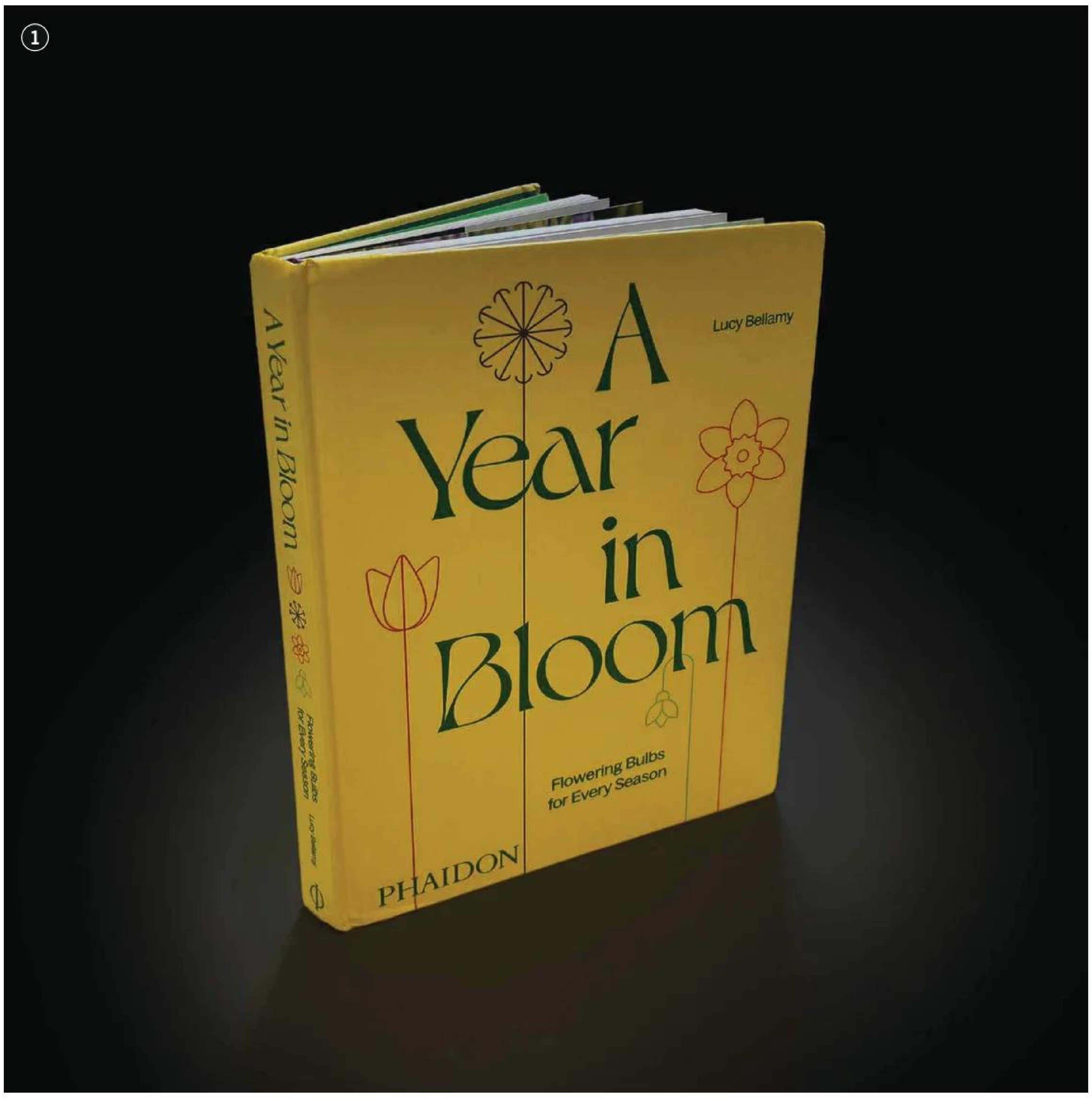
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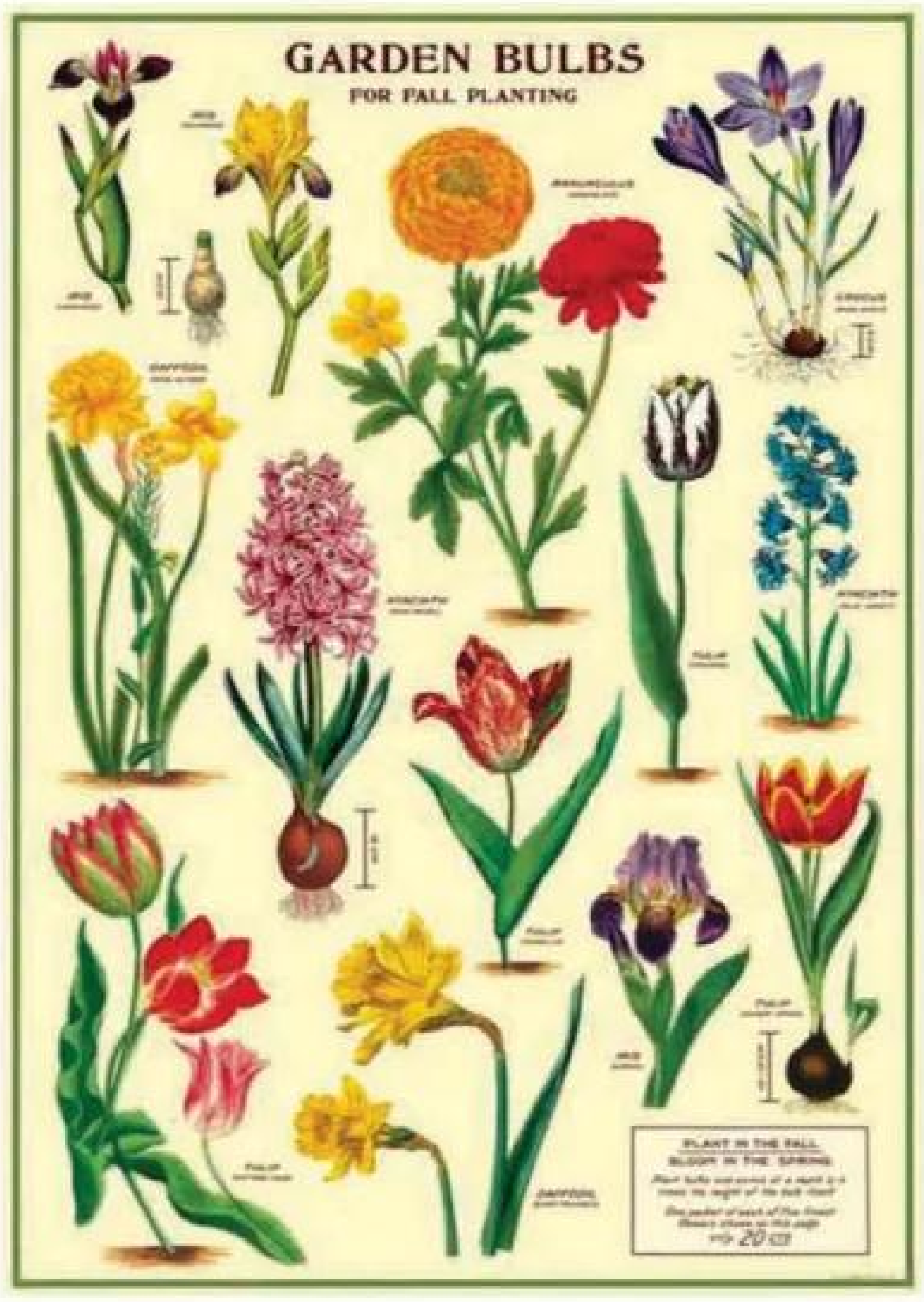
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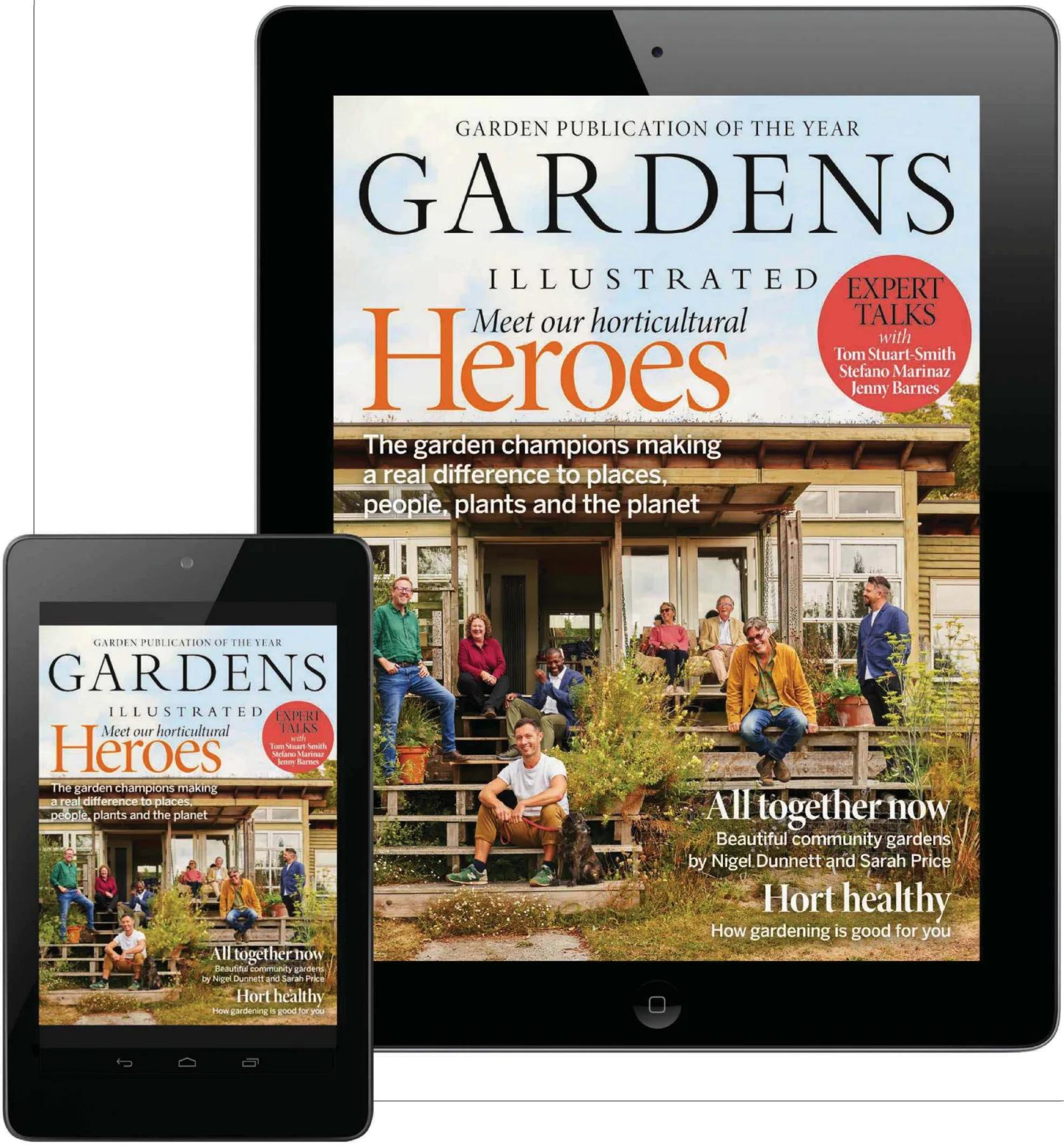
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Autumn at
Sissinghurst

October plants

Andrea Brunsendorf savours autumn beauties including a long-flowering, pale-pink rose, an ethereal lemon yellow sunflower and a curious orange-seeded spindle tree

Gardening is good for you

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Looking down from Sissinghurst's famous Elizabethan tower offers an unrivalled view of the garden and the Kentish farmland that sweeps up to its walls.

Autumn at Sissinghurst

As the garden slips into a new season, head gardener Troy Scott Smith and his team are busy with tasks from hedge cutting and lawn work to bulb planting and sowing seeds

WORDS **TROY SCOTT SMITH** PHOTOGRAPHS **JOHN CAMPBELL**

> We work quickly but methodically to plans made earlier. Everything that can usefully be done now, should be, with the emphasis always on next year

Devoid of the exuberance of Vita Sackville-West's flower garden, Harold Nicolson's structure slowly begins to reveal itself in autumn – vistas open up and the sharp lines of his pen are once more etched into the garden.

It is now October and the change of mood from the flamboyance of summer to the mellow days of autumn brings a shift of gear in the garden. The symphony of colours, from the low smoulder of sedums in hues of faded Venetian red to the burning torch of *Euonymus alatus,* reminds us that time is short. The first frosts of the season will induce a sudden surge of senescence, making the soil cold and wet.

We work quickly but methodically to plans made earlier. Everything that can usefully be done now, should be, with the emphasis always on next year. Hedge cutting remains a key autumn task. Our deciduous hedges of beech or hornbeam (where the ground is a little wetter) are cut twice, once in the second week of June and again in late September. For box, we have shifted to a late autumn/winter cut (when not frosty or wet), with an idea that it is helpful to disrupt the overwintering box caterpillar. However, the bulk of our hedges are of yew and these are cut between 1 August and 1 November. Any sooner than the start of August and the hedge is tempted to grow again, if left any later than the beginning of November, new, young shoots may be exposed to frost.

It is clear to me that climate change is causing notable change, not only to the plants we can grow, but also to how we garden. With dahlias, for example, which hitherto we would have lifted, we now either leave them in, planting them a little deeper so as to fill the space above with spring plants, or we still lift them, but later. In this case, we plant them further apart so we can add biennials to the spaces with the dahlias still in situ.

Autumn is also a time to pause and appreciate the season and the life around us. One of my favourite sights is that of the halos of red around the trees in the Orchard. These are the fallen apples we deliberately allow to drop. Throughout the autumn and winter, hedgehogs, mice and birds, including visiting fieldfares and redwings, feast on these apples, so that by spring not a morsel remains. □

Turn the page to see more of Sissinghurst's autumn garden ▷

Main image
The Orchard offers a bumper crop of fruit in autumn, much of which is left to fall to the ground for foraging wildlife. The grass is also the setting for the numerous spring-flowering bulbs the team plant in autumn.

Bottom row from left
Harold and Vita both loved dahlias, which have always been mainstays of Sissinghurst's late-summer garden. Troy has recently added pink *Dahlia* 'Stolz von Berlin', an old cultivar dating from 1884, to the Rose Garden.

Several asters light up the garden between September and the first frosts. Some old and unknown specimens, such as this one in the Purple Border, remain as 'heirlooms' from an earlier time. Elsewhere, Troy uses what he calls "the indispensable" *Aster* x *frikartii* 'Mönch', which has large lavender-blue flowers that continue for months.

In the White Garden, Troy pairs *Cosmos bipinnatus* 'Purity' with *Symphyotrichum pilosum* var. *pringlei* (formerly *Aster pilosus* var. *demotus*), which he has taken with him from garden to garden. "A delightful species aster," he says. "Its arching sprays of white flowers complement the cosmos perfectly."

Hedge cutting the Rondel

The Rondel is what Vita and Harold called the circular yew hedge they planted, in what would become the Rose Garden. The name Rondel and the proportion of the circle references the oast houses (built for drying hops) typical of this area. The planting of the Rondel was Harold's elegant solution to disguise the irregularity of the Rose Garden and acts as a pivot between two primary vistas. In addition, it is a welcome decompression chamber from the exuberance of Vita's planting.

The Rondel, in common with all our hedges at Sissinghurst, is part of the living architecture that forms the bones of the garden. The weighty stillness of the hedges provides the anchor point for the more ephemeral garden elements, and as such the annual clipping can't come soon enough – it injects a solidity and calmness to the scene, a sense of order in the otherwise lush planting.

Both sides of the hedge are always cut before the top, and from the bottom up. When it comes to the top of the hedge, you have two choices – to cut level with the land or to cut using a spirit level. With very sloping ground it is best to cut with the slope, whereas using a spirit level is most effective in more formal situations and where there are no great differences in the lie of the land.

The weighty stillness of the Rondel provides the anchor point for the more ephemeral elements of the garden

AUTUMN TASKS AT SISSINGHURST

Autumn turf work

Work on grass areas is essential in autumn to relieve compaction and repair worn or bare areas. We remove the build-up of thatch (dead grass that lies in the sward) using a scarifier (on a smaller scale, a metal-tined rake does just as well). We then improve surface aeration and drainage using a mechanical spiker fitted with hollow tines, which pulls out and collects cores of soil. We fill the resulting holes by brushing in a top dressing of sharp sand or old potting compost. On bare areas, we mix grass seed in with top dressing to oversow. We use a hollow roller (see facing page) with a mesh skin that evenly distributes the top dressing and seed mix over the lawn. One trick I've learned is to pre-germinate the grass seed by mixing it with the top dressing a week or so before broadcasting. This ensures that the lawn greens up more quickly, and fortunately the pigeons don't seem to be interested in eating the germinated seed.

Sowing yellow rattle

For several years we've worked to a plan of meadow enrichment. It's starting to show rewards, with a significant increase in the wildflower species we're seeing and a subsequent uplift in pollinators and other insects. One part of this is the weakening of the grass sward by growing the semi-parasitic annual yellow rattle, *Rhinanthus minor*. Sowing now into scratched patches of lawn or meadow should result in germination next spring and flowering in May and June, with real-time weakening, and successive self-sowing continuing the process.

Planting biennials

Biennials are ready to move into their flowering position in the garden around mid-October to late November. We grow a range, including wallflowers, sweet Williams, foxgloves, *Verbascum* and some more unusual ones, such as *Campanula patula* and *Michauxia campanuloides*.

Growing hardy annuals

Traditionally, hardy annuals are sown in early spring, but we are sowing an increasing number, such as *Ammi*, *Nigella*, *Centaurea*, *Atriplex*, *Orlaya*, *Cosmos* and our special white poppy (grown from our own seed since Vita's time) in September and October. Not only will these late-summer sowings provide earlier-flowering and larger plants, but it is another way in which we are adapting our gardening to a changing climate. Autumn-sown plants are planted out in early February and by flowering time in April and May they are well established and more able to cope with periods of drought than the spring-sown annuals.

Seed collecting and cleaning

At monthly intervals from midsummer until the new year, we scour the garden for ripe seed. With some practice, just the right moment of ripeness can be judged. Too early and your sowings are sure to fail, too late and the hungry birds will have their fill. Plants have adapted very successful mechanisms for seed dispersal, so you need to get in there first. We carefully cut selected flowerheads, placing them upside down in a brown paper bag. These are labelled and put in a warm, dry place; we put ours on the greenhouse staging, where there is good air movement. After a week or so, when the collected flowerheads are thoroughly dry, the next stage is to clean them ready for storing and later sowing.

Planting bulbs in meadow grass

Each year I like to add a few bulbs to the Orchard and meadow areas to top up any losses or shy flowerers. In these 'wilder' areas, I choose bulbs for their simplicity, favouring the species or those that look similar. My go-to narcissi are the early flowering native *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* and the late-flowering *N. poeticus* 'Recurvus', which is wonderfully scented, too. I am experimenting with 'shared' planting, with what appears to be good results. I make a hole by removing a core of soil using a bulb planter, and into the same hole I plant three bulbs at varying depths – for example, narcissi, fritillaries and crocuses – topped with a small plug-grown plant such as a primula or cardamine.

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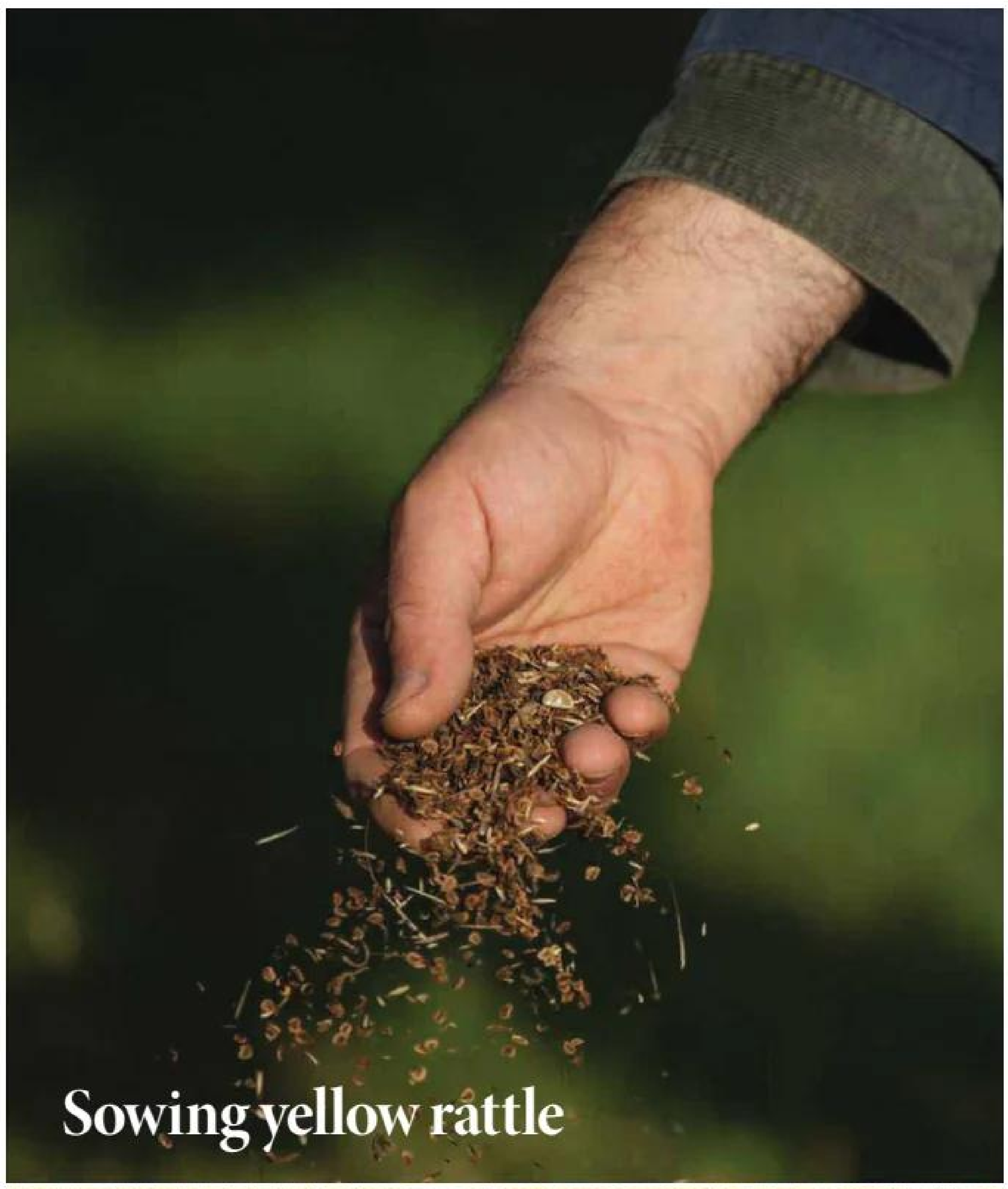
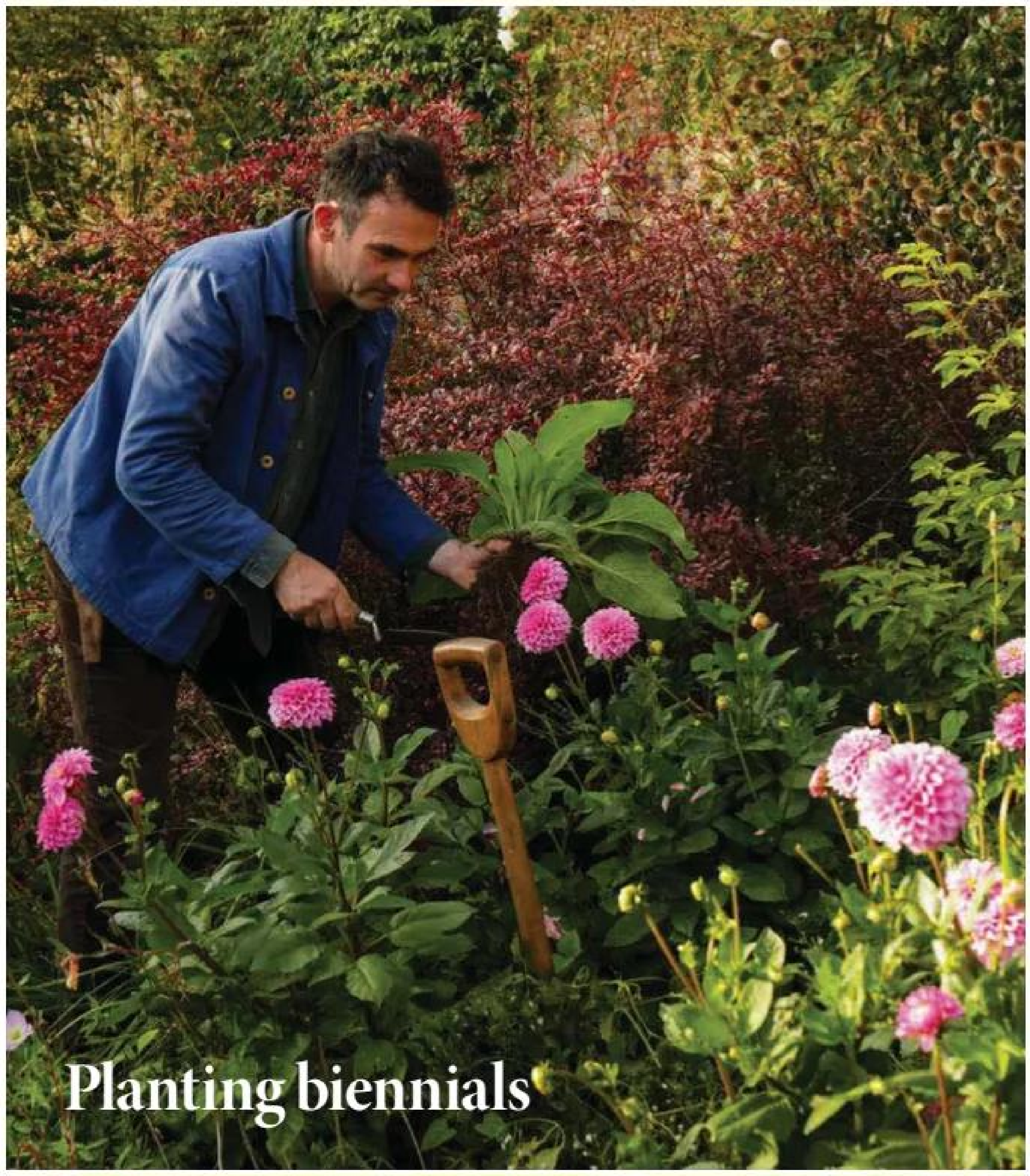
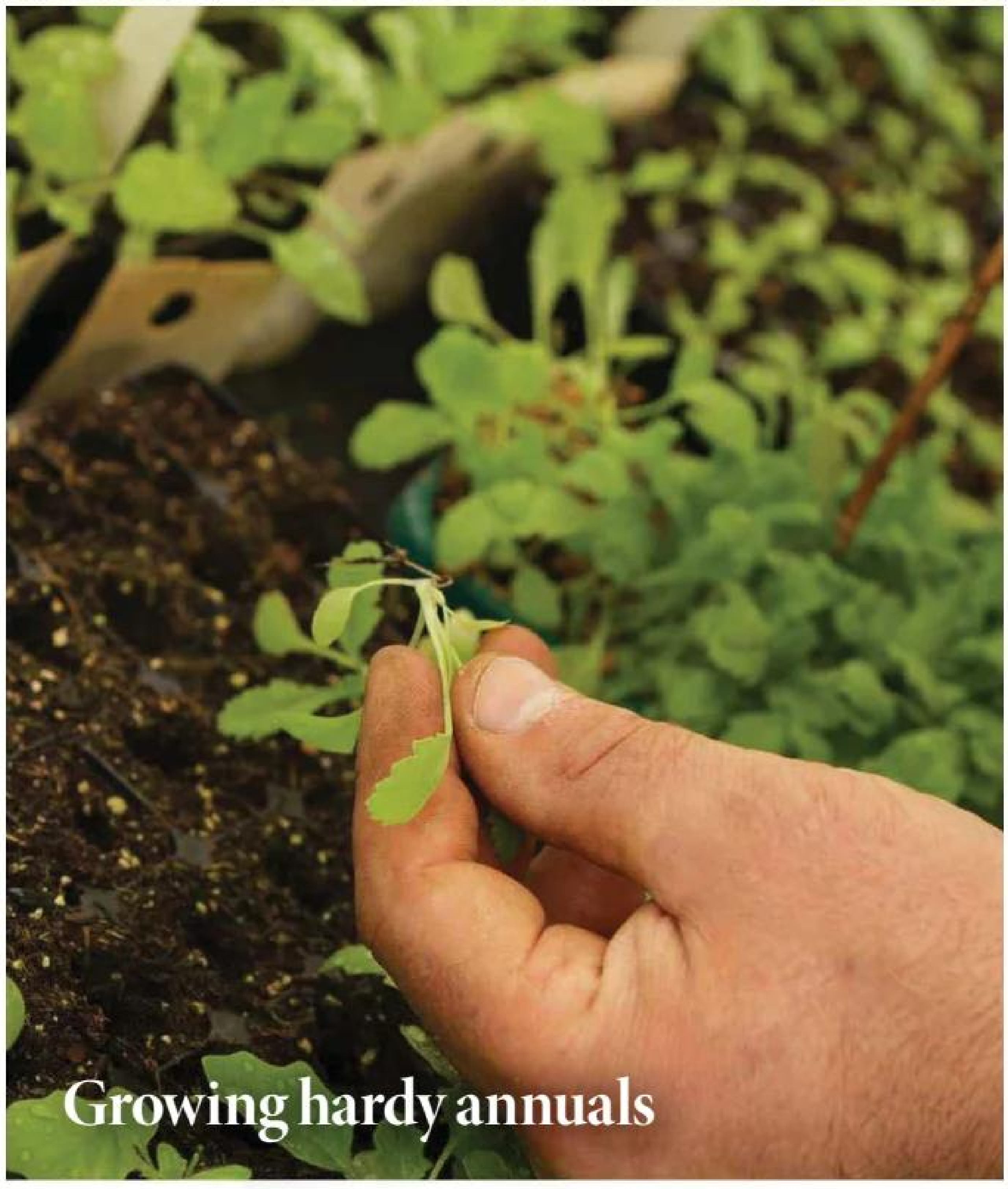


Sowing yellow rattle



Planting biennials



Growing hardy annuals

Late-summer sowings provide earlier-flowering, larger plants, and are one way in which we are adapting our gardening to a changing climate

Autumn turf work

Ilex Nellie R Stevens

Ligustrum japonicum (pleached)

Magnolia grandiflora

CREATING PRIVACY WITH SCREENING TREES

Photinia Red Robin

Privacy in gardens can be created using trees to hide or screen out an undesirable view. Trees grown for this purpose often have a clear stem up to fence panel height around 1.8-2m with a full bushy canopy above, forming a good screen above the fence line. This type of screening is particularly useful if the garden is overlooked by neighbouring properties or to retain lower-level exposure to an attractive wall or area.

Semi-mature trees can be planted to achieve effective screening from the offset with evergreens being preferred for this purpose as they screen throughout the year. However, a planting scheme that includes deciduous trees can provide rich contrast and seasonal interest.

Screening Trees

Practicality Brown can supply a range of top quality trees for screening, which are particularly useful for creating privacy. This is our selection of the best screening trees, and all are in stock at our nursery in Iver, Bucks:

- Eriobotrya japonica
- Ilex aquifolium Nellie R Stevens
- Ilex castaneifolia
- Ligustrum japonicum
- Magnolia grandiflora
- Osmanthus aquifolium
- Photinia fraseri 'Red Robin'
- Pinus nigra
- Prunus laurocerasus 'Novita'
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Pleached Trees

We also have a range of pleached trees which can be used in the same way; pleached trees can be effective for formal screening and where space is limited.

These are our best trees that are in stock:

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- Photinia fraseri 'Red Robin'
- Prunus laurocerasus 'Novita'

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SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE

In the culinary world, chefs and food writers sometimes closely guard their recipes, says **Nigel Slater**. Among gardeners, however, there is a refreshing spirit of generosity

ILLUSTRATION PAUL WEARING PORTRAIT JOHN CAMPBELL

I am waiting in the appropriately named green room before recording a short piece for a gardening programme. A much-loved icon, hero to many, walks in and says an immediate and cheery hello. I am being greeted like an old friend, despite the fact we have never met before. Asked how my garden is doing, I witter on, tongue-tied and star-struck, about the problems of finding something that will survive under the canopy of my *Robinia* tree. I half expect this to be the end of the conversation, like discussing your latest ailment with a random doctor you have just bumped into at a party, but instead, I am given a wheelbarrow full of ideas, from *Vinca major*, the pale-purple periwinkle, to the more imaginative suggestions of twinkling hepaticas and reliable *Cyclamen coum*. The presenter's thoughts come with an enthusiasm that strikes me as genuine, thoughtful and exceedingly generous, considering how busy they must be.

Another year, another Chelsea, and I am exploring the show garden of a well-known designer, who talks unhurriedly, letting me into the secrets of how the space was put together, the intricacies of getting it sponsored and a clue as to where it will end up after the show. Tips, tricks and advice are clearly being shared with pleasure. Marry this to the assorted cuttings handed out by friends, the bags of seed kindly donated and the little pots of bulbs and annuals brought as house gifts, and you soon realise the natural generosity of gardeners.

I have yet to meet a mean or secretive gardener. Where I have come across the occasional cook who refuses to share their oh-so-special recipe, I have never met a gardener who ▷

Generosity is clearly in the DNA of those who tend and love a green space. The propensity to nurture a plant extends to caring about others

▷ was anything less than happy to bestow their wisdom, not to mention garden bounty, with all and sundry.

Generosity is clearly in the DNA of those who tend and love a green space. The propensity to nurture a plant presumably extends to caring about others, to happily gift a cutting or brown envelope of seeds, to offer a helping hand to those less experienced. To educate, inform and pass on knowledge to others sounds trite, but it is done so lightly you know it is done simply for love of sharing rather than showing off.

I part company with those visitors to open-to-the-public gardens who feel a few secretive cuttings are included in the price of admission. They are not. Yet, chat to the professional gardeners tending the borders, show an interest in a particularly splendid plant, and they will, often as not, offer a carefully snipped shoot for that little plastic bag you have stowed in your pocket. They know when a plant can spare the odd stem or two and when it can't.

Friends are only too happy to gift a plant or even several, knowing that you will, perhaps, think of them when it settles in and finally flowers. I am sure there are those who can take you around their borders pointing out the provenance of great-aunt Mabel's phlox or their ex-husband's forget-me-nots, and I am willing to bet there are some who have rarely had to cough up for a single plant. Gardeners, it seems, are natural givers.

I find those who dig, plant and weed also carry a certain determination. Mention your failure with a specific plant and they will often encourage you to have another go. Your story is usually met by a similar admission about their own bête noire and how they deal with it. I find this exchange, especially from well-known or exceptional gardeners, rather encouraging; it takes the sting out of my own failures. 'Have another go' seems to be tattooed on every gardener's soul.

The more gardeners I meet, the more I detect an intrinsic urge to simply make the world a more beautiful place. The shared dislike of grey spaces, of wasted land and unloved ground. The simple idea that a greener world is a better world. Why else would neighbours plant fennel and borage around the lampposts or scatter nasturtium seeds at will as they walk? What else would make them tend an unadopted green space or plant hollyhocks around a broken tree stump left behind by the council?

There are other quiet, gentle qualities too, such as that of hope. Anyone who plants a packet of seeds is surely full of it. Those basil seeds will work this time. A rose planted in a dark corner, a bee house or a home for hedgehogs installed in the garden. Tenaciousness, determination and hope run as deep as generosity in a gardener's heart.

You don't enrich the soil every spring, or plant a tree purely for yourself. You do it for those who will follow; a gardener's gift to future generations. If that isn't a sign of generosity, determination and hope, then I don't know what is. □

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Garden of Medicinal Plants – Chelsea Physic Garden Photo: R Alexander

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HEROES

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WORDS MOLLY BLAIR, STEPHANIE MAHON AND VERONICA PEERLESS PHOTOGRAPHS LISA LINDER

From left to right

Sarah Wilson

Best known as the creator and host of the Roots and All gardening podcast, Sarah Wilson is also CEO of Veterans' Growth. The charity works with military veterans who are suffering with mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, aiming to reduce anxiety, depression and isolation by creating long-term social relationships and introducing people to new skills via horticulture.

It was established in 2019 by Sarah's partner at the time, Jason Stevens – an army veteran who, after experiencing a stroke at the age of 35, found no support available. He realised gardening was the only thing that had any positive impact on his mental wellbeing, and founded the charity. It now operates with a team of seven and up to 15 volunteers, at an eight-acre site near Hastings in East Sussex, for which they pay peppercorn rent thanks to a kindly benefactor.

The team has created ornamental and veg-growing areas, as well as fruit cages, meadows, a pond, orchard and mixed woodland. "We try to incorporate a bit of everything, so that people get a taste of different sorts of gardening," says Sarah. They run horticultural therapy sessions, predominantly with military veterans but also members of the general public who are dealing with mental health challenges, tailoring the programme of work to each individual. This relaxed approach also extends to how people find their way to the charity – some through official referrals, and others through self-referring. "We've got very low barriers to entry," explains Sarah, "as we want to make it really easy for people to come along." veteransgrowth.org

Henry Agg

Henry will be a new face to many in horticulture, but not to his hundreds of thousands of Instagram followers. He built his profile with posts and reels on gardens and health, especially mental health. Recently, Henry did a sponsored 24-hour gardening marathon in aid of the charity Mind, live-streaming much of it from his own garden, as a way to raise funds but also to promote awareness about mental health challenges.

The motivation stemmed from his own experience. Henry works in high-level executive recruitment, but developed an interest in gardens and taught himself landscaping skills from books and YouTube. He studied for his RHS Level 2 and 3 qualifications in horticulture at night before studying garden design at The English Gardening School, and setting up his own design company last year.

Friends were amazed at how he managed to juggle his responsibilities as a father of three kids, working full-time, studying, and growing his business and social media presence on the side. "I just put it down to being good at spinning plates," he says. "But then those plates came crashing down."

He suffered bouts of depression, anxiety and panic attacks. "I was in a terrible spot, and it was a real struggle for my family. That's when I started to speak with my GP and talk about it on Instagram. I got people reaching out to me saying, 'I've got depression too', or 'I feel suicidal'. I'd opened the door to all these people, and I'm not the most qualified to give mental health advice, but I can direct them to a charity such as Mind."

Henry knew the power of green therapies and that gardening can help lessen anxiety, and decided to give himself a goal or project to focus on – the marathon gardening challenge, which took place in August. "It was more of an endurance test than I thought," he admits. "I was extremely tired – I haven't done an all-nighter since I was a teenager." In the end, Henry single-handedly raised almost £11,700 in 24 hours. "It was a feel-good event," he says, "but I slept for about 20 hours afterwards." Instagram @henryagg

Continued from opening image (previous page)

Maggie Haynes

In 2005, after a career in the military, and despite having never grown anything in her life, Maggie decided to set up a community food-growing project near Emsworth in Hampshire. As a concerned mother of two young children, she wanted to introduce families to organic, homegrown produce and teach kids about the environment. She bought the land with a mortgage and set up a two-acre smallholding, but two years in, she realised that "you don't get much profit from lettuces or cucumbers".

Maggie pivoted to planning the building of a sustainable education centre that could host people in a weatherproof setting all year, and the project has grown and grown. Almost 20 years on, Tuppenny Barn is a registered charity providing services including educational visits for up to 2,000 children a year, who come to learn about where food comes from, and healthy eating. There are orchards with bee hives, soft-fruit cages, vegetable beds, cut-flower beds, polytunnels and a pond with boardwalk.

Maggie also runs a young carers' project with emotional wellbeing sessions for children between 11 and 13 who look after a family member. There are several social and therapeutic horticulture group sessions in the garden each week for adults, and the team of 15 plus 18 volunteers also facilitate City & Guilds training, courses in veg growing and a female veterans' group. Locals are welcome to drop in to buy plants, produce and homemade fare such as jams, to order a veg bag or come to the regular pub quizzes and Christmas market.

Maggie is now focused on raising funds to create a permanent shop, community café and outdoor classroom. "We're looking forward to an exciting future," she says.

tuppennybarn.co.uk

Kate Bradbury

Kate is a garden writer and author specialising in wildlife gardening, whose journey began when she fell in love with a nest of bumblebees living in an old duvet outside. "Bumblebee Conservation Trust told me how to move the nest, at night, to my first allotment. We dressed up in net curtains so we wouldn't get stung," she says. "I still got stung."

Working first on *Grow Your Own*, then BBC *Gardeners' World* magazines, Kate always added bits about bumblebees into everything she wrote. "I wouldn't stop going on about bees. I think I wore them down. They made me wildlife editor."

Since then she has gone freelance and written practical books including *The Wildlife Gardener*, but also the memoirs *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway* and *One Garden Against the World: In Search of Hope in a Changing Climate*, which came out this summer. Where other writers look at the broad strokes of these issues, Kate's focus is on her and our back gardens and the difference they can make. She recently fostered three orphaned baby seagulls, and runs a local hedgehog group.

She is patron of Froglife and the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, and an RHS and Butterfly Conservation ambassador. Kate is also an active thorn in the side of her local council, Brighton and Hove, campaigning about the importance of street weeds to wildlife, such as rare moths and goldfinches, and advocating for an end to pesticide use.

Kate's drive to make people understand the scale and impact of biodiversity loss has only become more urgent. "I've been banging on about bees since 2006 and I feel like I haven't done enough, because this year has just been the worst year ever for bees and butterflies. We need to give more lifelines to species," she says. "Otherwise we're going to lose everything."

Instagram @kategbradbury

Mo Kebbay

Mo is head of diversity, inclusion and wellbeing at the Royal Horticultural Society, a role he took up in June 2022 after working in the same field in the banking, real estate and design sectors. He was aware of, and attracted to, the organisation's community outreach programmes, and believed he could add value.

He started out with a period of discovery, talking and consulting with people from all arms of the charity. "It takes some time to understand the diverse functions of the RHS and I needed to learn about these different parts of the organisation," he says. "I discovered that the RHS is truly amazing, mammoth and complex, with many moving parts."

To get a sense of the representation of different groups, Mo ran a campaign to encourage employees to update and share their diversity information. Since he started, he has also introduced a financial wellbeing hub to support employees facing challenges with the cost-of-living crisis; launched a diversity, inclusion and wellbeing steering group; developed networks for LGBT+, menopausal and neurodivergent employees; and signed an industry charter to commit to opening up horticulture to under-represented groups.

Mo has now created a diversity, inclusion and wellbeing plan called Becoming Inclusive by Instinct, focused on making the RHS a more inclusive organisation that fosters a culture of belonging, and cultural and social equity. It includes the aim to increase the percentages of employees from ethnic minorities, with disabilities and who are LGBT+ by 2030.

rhs.org.uk

Liz Nicholson

Liz is managing director of landscape design and construction company Nicholsons. Concerned about the environmental impact of the spaces she was creating, she took time during the Covid-19 lockdown to become a chartered environmentalist, which set her on the path to developing the Green Design Audit.

It's tricky to accurately measure the carbon emissions and other impacts of a garden design, meaning the sector is quite a way behind other industries. When the RHS first began developing its sustainability goals and asked show garden designers at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show to quantify these sorts of things, no one was sure where to start or what tools to use – a situation that Liz, as a senior show garden judge, was aware of and increasingly uncomfortable with.

She began thinking about the parameters for a tool that could do this, in line with natural capital accounting. She considered carbon emissions and material usage (focusing on reducing waste), the extent to which a design enhanced biodiversity and ecologies, and reduced impacts on water and air pollution, as well as the impacts on societies and communities. "There are around 100 questions that tackle this broad subject area," explains Liz, "giving somewhat arbitrary scores to guide every designer. It isn't a question of passing or failing, but more an educational tool and an aspiration to improve."

This year, the audit was adopted by the RHS for all Chelsea show gardens, and it reduced emissions by around 25 per cent. Liz is now working with the technical advisory groups of other industry bodies, such as the Society of Garden Designers, the Landscape Institute and the British Association of Landscape Industries, to develop the tool further and build it into a web-based platform. nicholsonsgb.com

John Little

John's LinkedIn profile says he is a 'hole digger' – a typically humorous understatement from this former shoe salesman turned wildlife-garden guru. Owner of the Grass Roof Company and the brownfield-inspired Hilldrop garden in Essex, he's an avid experimentalist, growing in waste substrates to create low-input, biodiversity-boosting planting.

He is also the founder of a new community interest company, Care not Capital, which wants to matchmake skilled gardeners with organisations such as housing associations, hospitals and community gardens, and support them to work together in improving the provision of public green space. John spent many years managing the grounds of Clapton Park housing estate in Hackney, London, working with the residents to develop and maintain it in imaginative ways. By listening to what they wanted and delivering it, he ensured people valued their surroundings and felt ownership of it – quite different from the usual grounds-maintenance team approach.

John wants other places to benefit from this ethos and believes in investing more in gardeners to look after existing spaces, as opposed to always putting money into new infrastructure and projects. He is developing a Gardeners' Charter looking at all the important aspects of a gardener's work, and plans to hold training at Hilldrop for working gardeners to help them upskill in everything their job requires outside of horticulture. "We want to redefine what the modern gardener should be," he says. There are also plans to fund gardeners to support community groups, paying them properly to consult, advise and guide volunteers and organisers on how to succeed and thrive. Instagram @grassroofco

JC Niala

JC Niala wears many hats – writer, historian, anthropologist, poet and artist are some of them – but has recently become known for campaigns around access to allotments. She has an anthropology DPhil in urban gardening from St Catherine's College, Oxford, and has written several papers on the subject. She also writes about allotments and contributed to the book *This Allotment: Stories of Growing, Eating and Nurturing*, edited by Sarah Rigby and published earlier this year.

During her doctorate, she embarked on a project to recreate a 1918 allotment on Elder Stubbs Allotments in Oxford. Drawing parallels between the 1918 Spanish flu and Covid-19, the project explored the role of outdoor spaces in times of crisis, particularly pandemics.

Through growing heritage varieties of vegetable, the plot offered a direct connection to those who tended the same land over 100 years earlier, becoming a space of living history. It also inspired individuals to share wartime allotment stories from their families and talk about those lost during Covid – highlighting the power of allotments as spaces of connection.

In 2023, JC was the lead artist on a project with Greenpeace that led to allotments making headlines across the UK after finding that 174,183 people were on a waiting list for a plot.

"Access to growing spaces is not just about food; it's about reconnecting with the basics that sustain us," she says. "In urban settings, where life can be overwhelming, the act of gardening brings us back to simple, essential rhythms. It's a way to improve our mental and physical wellbeing, a reminder that in nurturing the earth, we nurture ourselves."

Through her research and projects, JC highlights untold gardening stories, opens up conversations around access to growing space, and ultimately helps people to connect with each another and the earth.

Instagram @jcniala

Sarah Cook and Jim Marshall

When we sent out feelers to ask who we should include in our heroes special, Jim Marshall's name came up again and again. Jim has gardened and been part of the industry all his life, spending 25 years at the National Trust as gardens adviser. He also worked closely with the national training organisation Lantra, encouraging young people and those seeking a career change to consider land-based jobs – a cause, like that of horticulture in schools, about which he is passionate. Jim was awarded the prestigious Victoria Medal of Honour in 2023, is vice chair of the RHS Herbaceous Plant Committee and has been part of the conservation charity Plant Heritage since it began in 1978. He holds two National Collections of *Dianthus* – including the much-diminished and tricky-to-grow Malmaison cultivars, which he is determined to retain in cultivation.

He shares this conservation drive with his wife Sarah Cook, who was head gardener at Sissinghurst for 14 years, but is best known now for researching, tirelessly hunting down and rescuing from obscurity the Benton irises from disparate corners of the UK and the world. She holds the National Collection of Sir Cedric Morris iris introductions, which she showed at RHS Chelsea in 2015, winning a Gold medal for her impactful exhibit. This spawned a new demand for these unusual blooms in painterly tones of creamed-coffee, purple and burgundy – now back in fashion and most memorably used by Sarah Price in her 2023 Chelsea show garden.

This impressive couple are active in their home county of Suffolk, regularly holding open garden days, and despite being in the sector for decades, are always up for embracing and promoting new developments and change, such as going peat-free.

Lee Connelly

Lee didn't get into gardening until he was in his mid-twenties, when the opportunity arose to build and grow an allotment with his brother. "As as kid, I didn't have much access to outdoor spaces or gardening," he says. "I didn't even know how potatoes grew until I started growing them myself."

His passion lies with getting children into gardening; something that was sparked when he became the gardener for BBC *Blue Peter* and a father at the same time. Since then, he has appeared on BBC Teach and BBC Radio 1 to discuss the topic and has written *How to Get Kids Gardening*. He is also the House of Lords Expert on Children's Gardening, and in 2023, he was named the UK's leading children's gardening educator.

As part of his commitment to teaching the next generation of green fingers, he founded School Gardening Success in 2021, a programme that brings gardening into primary schools and teaches children to grow their own food and how to look after wildlife.

"I wanted to create a programme that really empowered schools to embed gardening into their culture," he says. Schools get access to online guides, videos and expert support, and receive a raised bed along with tools, compost and seeds so that the class can start growing straight away. "It needed to be something easy to adopt, where teachers didn't feel overwhelmed or underprepared," says Lee.

The programme has been transformative for hundreds of children; some have been so enthusiastic about what they've learnt that their parents have set up gardens at home, and many schools have launched gardening clubs because the children want to spend more time growing. Through his continued advocacy work, Lee hopes that gardening will become an essential part of the curriculum in the future.

skinnyjeangardener.co.uk; schoolgardeningsuccess.co.uk

Thomas Kendall *(above left)*

Even if you haven't heard of Wayward, you might have already experienced its work. The award-winning collective of designers, artists and urban growers was formed in 2006, and has since pioneered the ambitious and large-scale temporary greening of derelict sites and 'meanwhile' spaces. Associate director Thomas has been running Wayward alongside founder Heather Ring since its first large-scale project, Union Street Urban Orchard in Bankside, London, which transformed a derelict site into a thriving community orchard of 85 fruit trees.

Aside from these projects, a key aspect of Wayward's work is its laudable reuse scheme, called the House of Wayward Plants, which started out almost 20 years ago as a small plant adoption project, meant to engage people with plants. Wayward has now been the Official Reuse Partner for the RHS for almost ten years, redistributing thousands of plants, trees and materials each year from RHS flower shows, including Chelsea, to community groups and gardens, schools and hospitals.

Next year is set to be even more exciting, as Wayward is currently working on a site in Colindale, in collaboration with Notting Hill Genesis, which is providing funds and land to build a large new community garden. It will also act as a five-to-ten-year home for the House of Wayward Plants project, which will be built out of waste plants and materials from RHS shows."We can't wait to help rehome more plants and materials and become a new hub to support community gardens and schools across the city," says Thomas.

wayward.co.uk

Alla Olkhovska

Alla Olkhovska is a seed producer and photographer based in eastern Ukraine in the city of Kharkiv. Since 2022, the city has been a major target in Russia's invasion of Ukraine and many have fled the area. Alla continues to live there and cultivates a garden and seed business in the middle of the war. Her great-grandfather, Dmitriy, created Linden Grove Gardens in Kharkiv in the late 1940s and it was initially devoted to the production of fruit to feed the family and to trade.

The garden has been a constant presence in her life and Alla now uses the space as a trial ground for her ornamentals. She grows a choice selection, including around 140 different *Clematis* (the subject of her e-book), species peonies and rare perennials and bulbs.

Before the war, she had been researching naturally occurring variations of *Scilla siberica* in the local forests, selecting unusually coloured forms and growing them on. The forests now contain land mines and have become no-go zones, but she hopes to continue this work in the future. "We weren't able to leave and I still can't understand how we managed to survive," she says. Her husband encouraged her to keep on growing and to share her experience, which she does through social media.

Through her photographs of the garden and close-ups of her favourite plants, she documents her growing journey under conditions that are unimaginable to many of us. In her online shop, Alla continues to sell seeds and copies of her original images to help support her family. "Despite the challenging circumstances, I am determined to continue pursuing these creative outlets as a means of resilience and hope. I believe that even in the darkest times, cultivating beauty and capturing moments of nature can serve as a powerful antidote to despair."

allasgarden.com;
Instagram @allaolkhovska

ALLA OLKHOVSKA

Even in the darkest times, cultivating beauty and capturing moments of nature can serve as a powerful antidote to despair

RACHEL WARNE

Rosie Atkins

Rosie is the chair of Project Giving Back, the non-profit, grant-making scheme that gives other charitable organisations the funding and support to create show gardens at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. The charity originally pledged to fund 42 gardens at the show over three years (2022-2024) with an investment of around £12 million. The success of the scheme has prompted the anonymous founders to commit to two additional years of funding, with the aim of supporting 60 gardens in total, up to the 2026 show.

This is just the most recent example of years of charitable involvement for Rosie. The founding editor of *Gardens Illustrated* in 1993, she left the magazine after ten years to become curator of Chelsea Physic Garden. While there, she trained as an RHS show judge, and has been a member of, or chaired, various RHS committees, including the Bursaries and Awards Committees. Rosie has also served on the board of the Great Dixter Charitable Trust, Thrive, the Professional Gardeners Trust and the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association, of which she is now vice president, and was also on the council of the Linnean Society.

In March this year, Rosie was awarded the Elizabeth Medal of Honour. The award was established in 2023 by HM King Charles III, in memory of his late mother, Queen Elizabeth II, and enables the RHS Council to honour UK non-horticulturists (and international horticulturists) who have had an impact on the advancement of the science, art or practice of horticulture for the benefit of all generations and the environment. givingback.org.uk

Keely Siddiqui Charlick

Keely is CEO of Sunnyside Rural Trust, a Hertfordshire charity and social enterprise that offers training and work experience to people with learning disabilities and those on the neurodiverse spectrum.

It was founded in 1990 as a small horticultural project, and now offers services to more than 170 people a day across four sites. Trainees can acquire skills and employment in beekeeping, looking after chickens and larger therapy animals, growing plants and produce, landscaping and garden maintenance. They work on real projects, contract-growing plants, and are part of a thriving business – Sunnyside grows 45,000 bedding plants every year for Dacorum Borough Council, and sells a range of peat-free perennials to designers and the public. It also runs a veg-box scheme and sells organic products made from produce that trainees have grown. Recently, the trainees have started working out of a new nursery space at Tom and Sue Stuart-Smith's Serge Hill Project for Gardening, Creativity, and Health.

The charity prides itself on spotting people's strengths and skills, then building on them – something Keely is passionate about. She has helped transform Sunnyside from a small day service into a successful social enterprise. "I see people transformed by the smallest of tasks such as tending a cutting," she says.

"A plant humbles you and in that space you can find a lifeline. To see people lifted up by their work and in a garden, alive and thriving, is a thing of beauty." Keely received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2021, and wants to use Sunnyside Rural Trust to inspire other charities to move into trading, and create employment opportunities for other vulnerable young people and adults. sunnysideruraltrust.org.uk

A plant humbles you and in that space you can find a lifeline. To see people lifted up by their work and in a garden, alive and thriving, is a thing of beauty

Since its inception, The Orchard Project has helped to plant and restore more than 700 orchards and approximately 10,300 fruit trees – reaching thousands of people and their local communities

Rowena Ganguli and Carina Millstone

Rowena and Carina founded The Orchard Project (formerly the London Orchard Project) in 2009, inspired by a shared vision of filling the UK's capital with fruit trees. The aim of the project remains simple: to bring neighbours together to nurture their local environments into productive, resilient and beautiful spaces.

"The Orchard Project was born from a vision of abundance of fruit, of wildlife, of community relations," says Carina. "Starting in my home city of London, it's been thrilling to watch the project grow over the years and to see this vision become reality in communities across the UK, especially in areas lacking in access to green space and nature."

Since its inception, The Orchard Project has helped to plant and restore more than 700 orchards and approximately 10,300 fruit trees – reaching thousands of people and their local communities. It has also trained 400 orchard leaders, who are responsible for the implementation of the charity's orchard management plans.

The charity aims for everyone in towns and cities across the UK to be within walking distance of a thriving, community-run orchard. Since the 1900s, the UK has lost 80 per cent of its traditional orchards, so as well as planting new ones, The Orchard Project restores neglected heritage orchards, breathing new life into run-down spaces.

The pair have stepped away from running the project now, but they are still ambassadors. Rowena, who previously worked as a fruit buyer at Innocent Drinks, is now working with multiple investors to create beautiful homes.

Carina continues to be a committed environmental activist in her community, and, in her day job, she serves as executive director at Feedback, an environmental campaign group working for food that is good for planet and people.

theorchardproject.org.uk

Jimi Blake

Conversations about immigration are always difficult, but especially so in Ireland at present. Gardener Jimi Blake, who created and runs Hunting Brook Gardens in Wicklow, believes there are 2,000 people seeking asylum in his local rural area alone, with 500 of them living in tents. On St Patrick's Day weekend in March, before the usual city centre parade and festivities, a large camp of people who had been living on the street in Dublin were moved to a site near Hunting Brook. Jimi was brought to visit by Green Party councillor Hazel Chu. "I was appalled at the way they were being treated," he says, "and I wanted them to feel heard, and safe, and create a kind of community. I met the manager and some of the guys, and invited them to come to the garden for what we call a volunteer day, where we do some work in the garden and I teach them a little bit. The whole focus of the day is just to get out and have fun; a happy day, a chance to meet people, eat good food, play music and sing." The group usually comprises about 12-14 people, who come from countries including Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Jordan and Palestine. They visit once a week and do anything from pruning to pathwork, potting up, pricking out and deadheading. Many of the original group have already moved on to other parts of the country, but Jimi keeps in touch to follow their progress, and is delighted that one of his early volunteers loved gardening so much that he is now training professionally at the National Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin. As well as gardening at Hunting Brook, the group often visit other gardens together such as Ardán Garden near Howth, and have organised cultural and social events, including a beach barbecue. Jimi plans to keep growing the initiative, and for it to be a support network as well as an opportunity for people to learn new skills and be in nature. "It's all about the power of gardening, music, food and community," he says.

Instagram @jimiblake_
huntingbrookgardens

JOHN CAMPBELL

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO TUPPENNY BARN, HILLDROP, CHELSEA PHYSIC GARDEN AND OXFORD BOTANIC GARDEN WHERE MANY OF THESE PORTRAITS WERE TAKEN

One for all

A new community garden designed by Sarah Price around an old library turned arts centre in southeast London is a treasured space for local residents and garden lovers alike

WORDS **JODIE JONES** PHOTOGRAPHS **RICHARD BLOOM**

IN BRIEF

What Community garden.
Where London.
Size 700 square metres.
Soil Enriched clay, with a 20cm layer of recycled sand in the front garden.
Climate Temperate.
Hardiness zone USDA 7.

The garden contains exceptional planting, including swathes of *Digitalis lutea* and the rare, fragrant umbellifer *Chaerophyllum azoricum*, and an unusual greenhouse shaped like a bus, which references the old mobile library that used to operate from here.

Colin's tips for running a community garden

- **Create an atmosphere that welcomes everyone,** whatever their age, ability or interests. You need spaces where people can have a quiet time among the greenery, meet friends for a drink, or nip out from a ceramics class to forage seedheads to press into wet clay.

- **Have dynamism in the planting.** A garden that keeps changing keeps people coming back. Most people don't come across these sorts of clever, multi-layered seasonal combinations, and they do really capture everyone's attention.

- **Be open to the different reasons why people want to be in the garden.** Some may use their involvement for their CV, or will be looking for ideas or advice for their own gardens. Others will just value having somewhere to go – a fixed point in a week that may otherwise lack structure.

- **Incorporate a flexible space** where people can take ownership. At The Exchange there is a cutting patch for volunteers to grow what they like.

- **Set up systems that promote healthy, eco-friendly practices.** A garden is a great educational tool and can result in fun projects, such as the dead hedge built into the boundary fence here to hide an unattractive view and create a wildlife habitat.

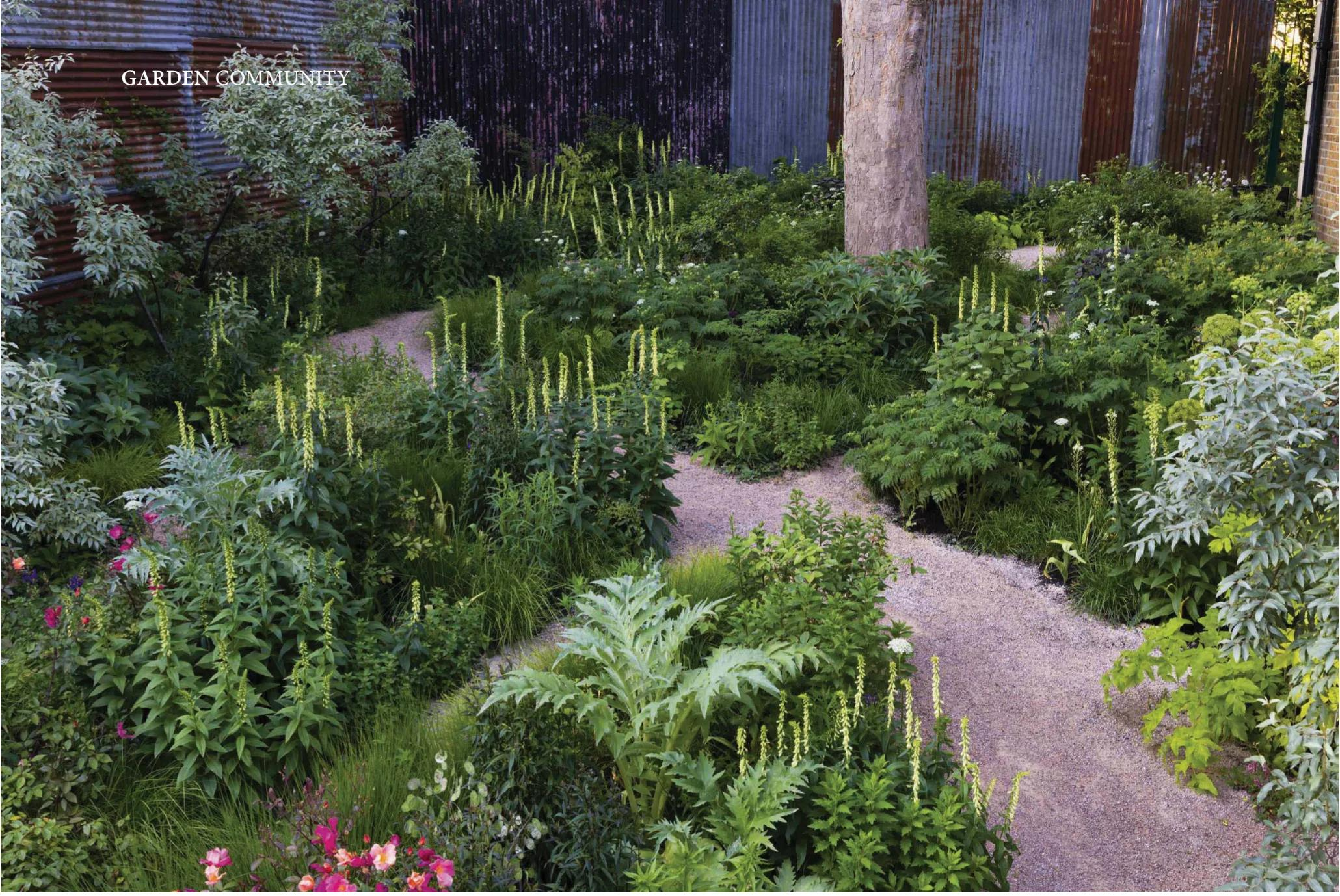
- **Have somewhere to plug in a kettle** and store a biscuit tin. Community gardens are fuelled by tea breaks.

It is no surprise to learn that the garden at The Exchange, with its painterly combinations of *Elaeagnus* 'Quicksilver', *Rosa* x *odorata* 'Mutabilis' and Benton irises, set off by mellow, handmade brick pavers and stylishly rusted corrugated fences, was designed by plant whisperer Sarah Price. What is almost impossible to believe is that this exceptional exercise in high horticulture is a freely accessible community garden in the southeast London suburb of Erith. And then the number 99 bus thunders past, and two worlds collide.

In 2016, all you would have seen from that bus window was a boarded-up library surrounded by brambles and rubbish. But then local residents Peter Nutley and Sarah Batten asked the council if they had any plans to regenerate the site. "Our timing was perfect," says Peter. "The council was looking for a local organisation to take over the space, and we had always daydreamed about turning it into a community arts space."

Having previously worked for the Churches Conservation Trust, Sarah had professional experience of comparable regeneration projects, while Peter had an arts background and six years as head technician at the Garden Museum under his belt. Together, they had the perfect combination of skills to turn their vision into reality, and the council snapped up their proposal. ▷

Long-flowering, hot-pink *Rosa* x *odorata* 'Mutabilis' is a recurring motif through the East Garden, alongside purple-flowered *Geranium* Rozanne (= 'Gerwat') spires of *Digitalis lutea* and silvery sprays of *Cynara cardunculus*. Pots of glossy, dark-leaved *Aeonium* 'Schwarzkopf' add repeated punctuation marks.



▷ "It still wasn't easy," says Peter. "With limited funding, we had to phase the work while applying for more grants, but we always knew we wanted to create a destination garden that would bring new people into the area, as well as enhance the lives of those who were already here." They also knew which designer they wanted for the job. "I'd worked with Sarah at the Garden Museum and loved her aesthetic, but I was still surprised when she replied to my email," says Peter.

On her first visit, Sarah was struck not just by the site's design potential but by the possibility of creating something that would make a real difference to the lives of local people. "Peter talked about involving the community in the actual making of the garden, which fed into a lot of things I am interested in," she says.

Sarah was soon sketching out a draft plan that was very close to the garden that exists today. "I immediately knew the atmosphere I wanted to create, with site-appropriate patinated materials to show off the plants, but first there were lots of technical issues to deal with," she says.

One of those issues was the limited budget, which required a phased approach and a bit of lateral thinking in order to turn Sarah's ideas into reality. "We had to prioritise getting the levels right, which included huge excavations next to the building to open up what is now the Fern Yard, and putting in the bespoke Corten-steel steps that link this area with the upper level at the back of the building. It was an expensive but essential part of making a place that welcomed people in and invited them to explore."

The result was a series of gardens wrapping the entire building, linked by paths made from a mixture of crushed aggregate (repurposed from the building renovation) and bricks handmade in community workshops led by Local Works Studio, which also collaborated on Sarah's 2023 Chelsea garden. "I based the proportions of the bricks on the parquet flooring inside the building, and the clay was excavated from nearby roadworks, which the contractor gave us for nothing," says Sarah. "We worked really hard to ensure as many elements as possible were reclaimed or repurposed."

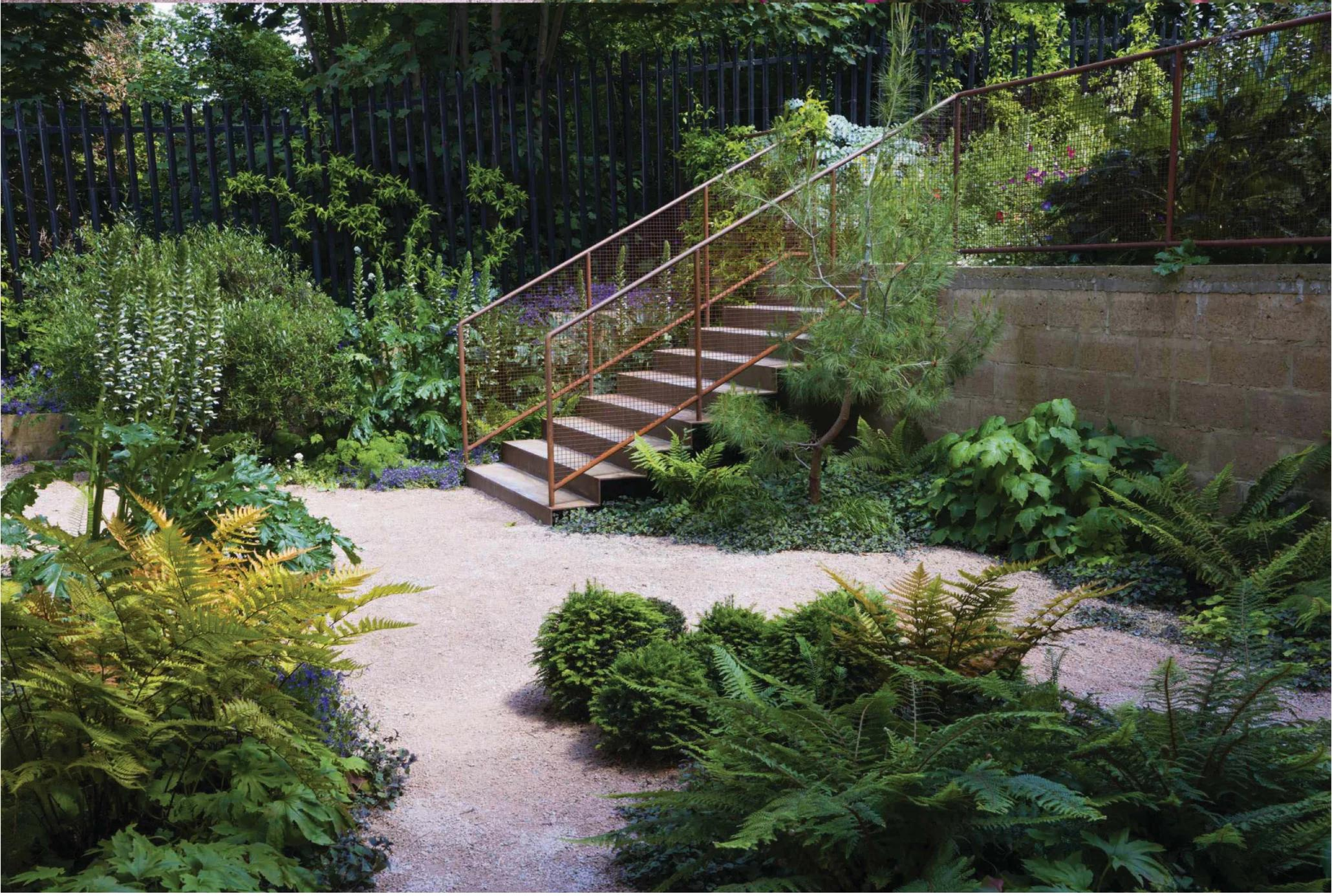
Those recycled elements included many of the plants, which were rehomed from a pop-up garden that Sarah had created for luxury brand Hermès. "The timing was just extremely lucky and, although that temporary garden looked very different, the plants translated really well into their new setting." She also used her connections with online nursery Crocus to acquire a number of the plants it had supplied for her last Chelsea garden. In all, by autumn 2021, Sarah had a palette of several thousand plants to get into the ground, aided by an army of volunteers ranging in age from toddlers to octogenarians. "We did it all ▷

Above At the shadier end of the East Garden, around an existing sycamore, a tapestry of varying textures and forms presents visitors with a masterclass in planting design, with foxgloves, cardoons, *Sesleria autumnalis* and *Angelica archangelica* standing out beautifully against the reclaimed rusted steel fence.

Right above The shrub *Elaeagnus* 'Quicksilver' is another signature plant, pruned with great artistry by head gardener Colin to heighten its natural form, open up views and play with negative spaces.

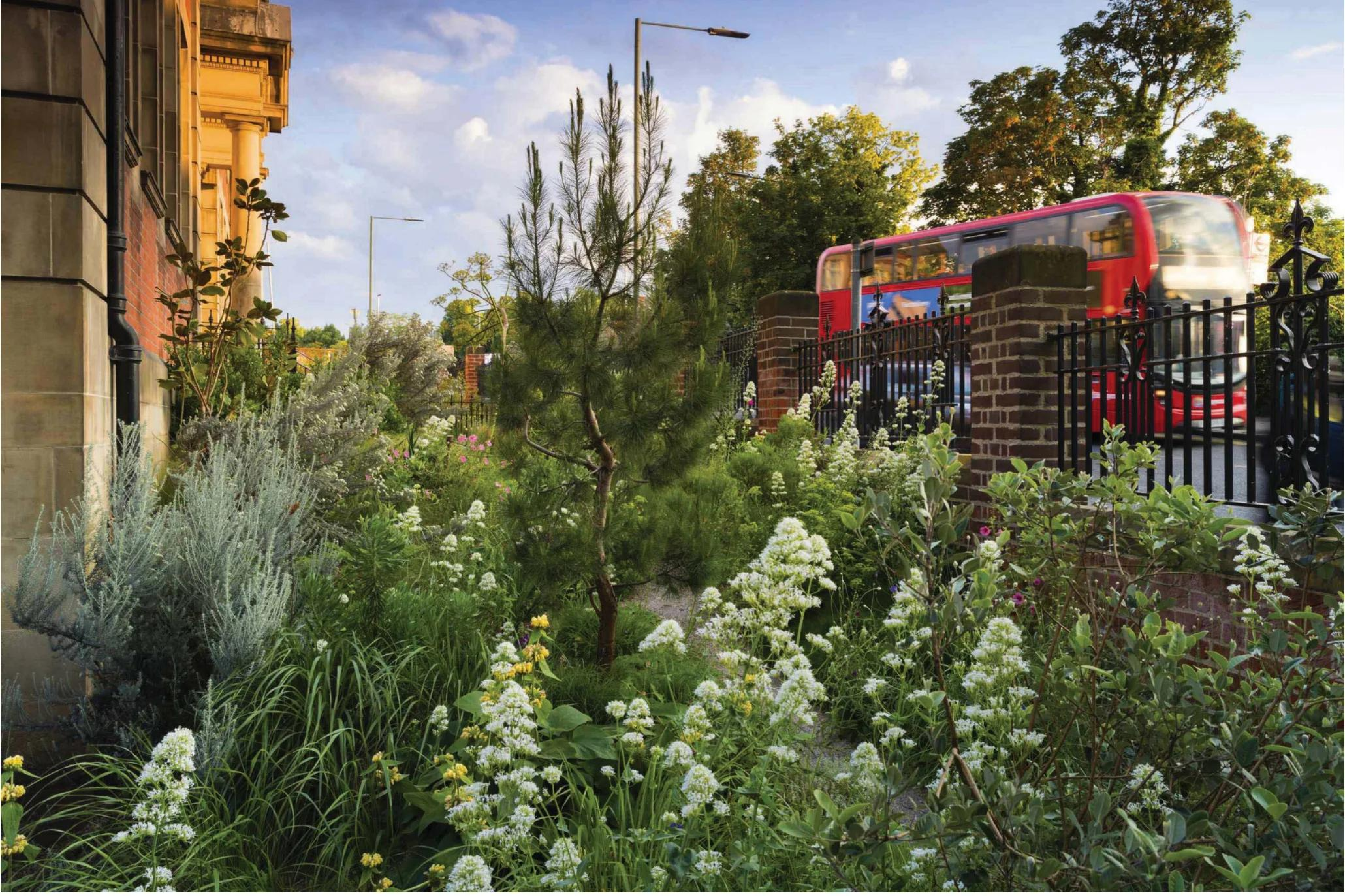
Right below At the foot of the Corten-steel steps in the Fern Yard, ferns, including *Dryopteris erythrosora* and *Polystichum setiferum* 'Herrenhausen' link together a mix of planting, including *Pinus halepensis*, *Acanthus mollis* 'Rue Ledan' and low mounds of yew.

Getting the levels right was an essential part of making a place that welcomed people in and invited them to explore



Exposed and often windswept, the free-draining Front Garden is filled in summer with a swathe of limey *Euphorbia seguieriana* subsp. *niciciana* and giant fennel, interspersed with *Catananche caerulea*, *Eschscholzia californica* 'Ivory Castle' and the sword-like foliage of *Eryngium yuccifolium*.

You're as likely to come across a community art group sketching the plants as you are a gaggle of garden-design aficionados



▷ in two mad days. Everyone was enthusiastic, but not everyone had the experience to work in the way we normally would on a job," she says, with masterful understatement.

Sarah eschews formal planting plans in favour of an intuitive approach that layers plants into a rich tapestry, and as she carefully set out pots in the prepared areas, she could only hope that the subtle relationships within each group would survive the planting process.

The volunteers rose magnificently to the challenge, helping to nurse the newly planted garden through the apocalyptic heatwave of summer 2022 and the Arctic winter that closely followed it. When head gardener Colin Stewart started in January 2023, he was astonished by what had been achieved. "The planting was incredibly generous. Sarah designs in time as well as space, so there was already a real depth and fluidity, which we have continued to develop."

Given Sarah's 'undone' aesthetic, the garden requires constant subtle tweaking to keep the picture in balance. A case in point is the narrow strip between the front of the library and the street, where *Euphorbia seguieriana* subsp. *niciciana* zings between clumps of *Iris* 'Benton Susan', *Gladiolus communis* subsp. *byzantinus* and *Hesperaloe parviflora*, with an airy understorey of self-seeding *Eschscholzia californica* 'Ivory Castle', culinary dill, *Stipa tenuissima* and *Centranthus ruber* 'Albus' that would overwhelm their more esoteric companions given half a chance.

Colin instinctively understands the challenge and then raises the stakes, introducing a splash of orange horned poppies here, a flutter of shell-pink Beth's poppies there. He has pruned the *Pinus halepensis* to enhance their edgy contortions and filled the greenhouse (a wonderful creation shaped like a library bus) with the zingiest pelargoniums he could lay his hands on.

Every Friday morning, the volunteers still turn out in force to help him. For the rest of the week, you're as likely to come across a community art group sketching the plants as you are a gaggle of garden-design aficionados on a pilgrimage, or a posse of toddlers taking their first wobbly steps on the handmade brick paths.

"Fifteen years after the library closed, I still get the odd person asking me if they can do their council tax here," says Colin. "But most of the time now, I feel that people are simply drawn by the beauty of the garden." □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Address The Exchange, The Old Library, Walnut Tree Road, Erith, London DA8 1RA. **Tel** 01322 341144. **Web** theexchangeerith.com
Open Wednesdays and Fridays, 10.30am-5pm; Thursday 10.30am-9pm. Open some Saturdays in summer and autumn. See website for details.

Top Striking silver *Ozothamnus rosmarinifolius* 'Silver Jubilee' and *Feijoa sellowiana*, alongside airily pruned *Pinus halepensis* drift up out of a mix of self-seeded *Centranthus ruber* 'Albus', soft-yellow *Phlomis russeliana*, *Cistus* x *argenteus* 'Silver Pink' and long-flowering *Anisodontea* 'El Rayo'.

Above Head gardener Colin Stewart is moving on from The Exchange, but his artistic eye and skilled hand have been essential to the ongoing success of the garden.

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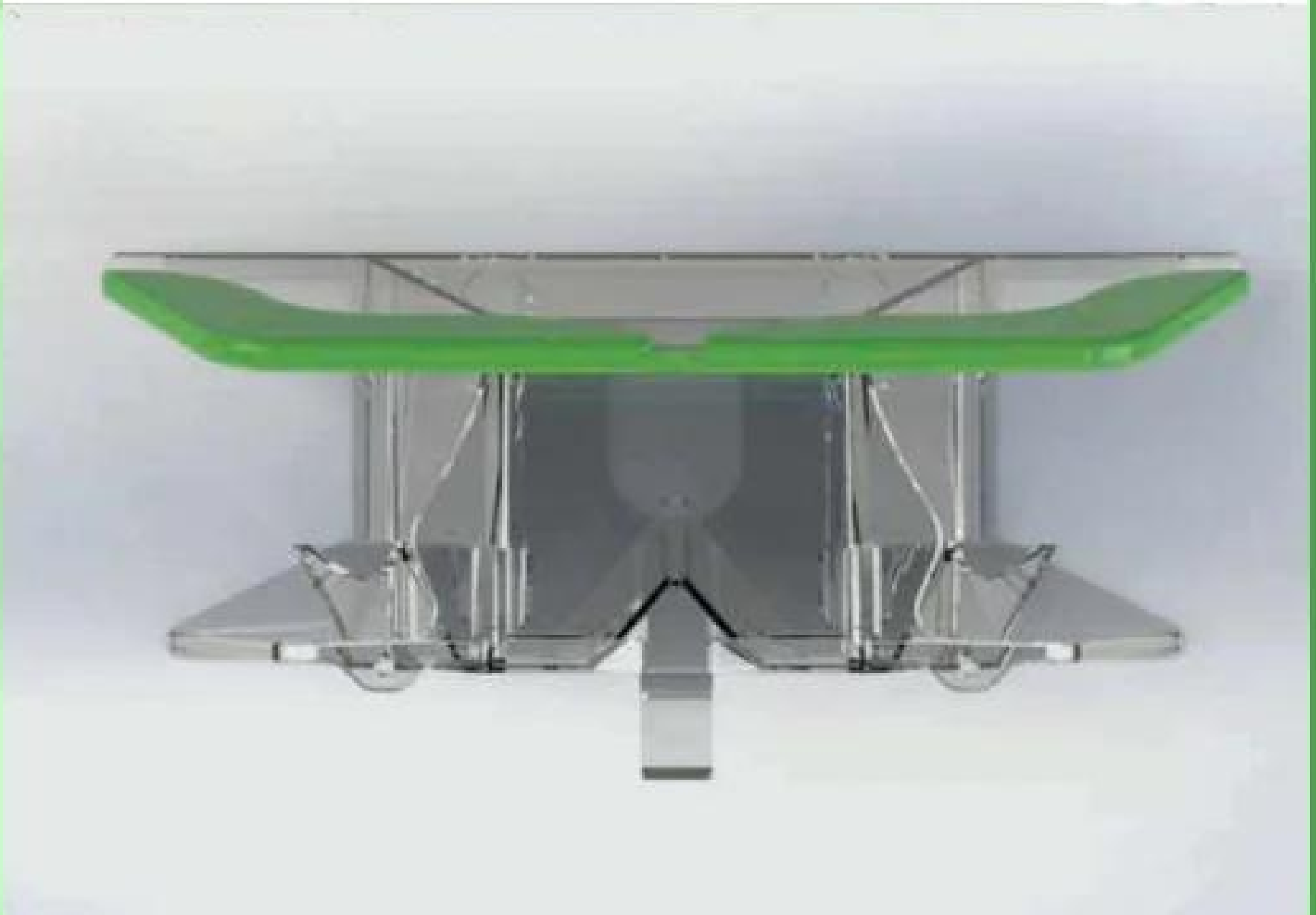

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INTERNATIONAL PATENTS PENDING

ADAM STOTER

As assistant park manager at The Royal Parks, Adam is proud to support the budding gardeners who follow in his footsteps on its apprenticeship scheme

PORTRAIT ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Earliest gardening memory When I was a child, I was like a bull in a china shop. Always energetic, I never stayed still, except in one place – my mother's friend's flower shop. There I'd become more like Disney's Ferdinand the Bull, relaxed and content, enjoying the scent of flowers.

First plant love I thought the dock plant was magic after my first brush with stinging nettles as a child. My mother reached for a leaf to crush and rub on to the sting.

What did you do before gardening? Initially, football. I left an academy at 17, and worked as a lifeguard and labourer before going back to college and then university to study forensic science. I dropped out after discovering a passion for gardening during a summer working at Hyde Park.

Who inspired your career the most? Lusine Lee, a Hyde Park gardener. He inspired in me – a 21-year-old who had never gardened before – a lifelong love of horticulture. He became a close friend and godfather to my son.

Horticultural hero After years of longing, I finally got to visit Great Dixter in 2021. I have since stayed there for weeks at a time, learning from head gardener Fergus Garrett. His infectious enthusiasm for teaching mirrors what I strive for at The Royal Parks.

Favourite garden that has influenced you In the 1970s, a derelict wasteland in the shadow of Trellick Tower in west London was reclaimed by the community and transformed into Meanwhile Gardens. I played there as a child without knowing the history. It's a testament to the power of communities that come together.

Most valuable training Applying for The Royal Parks apprenticeship was without doubt the best decision I made in my horticultural journey. Who would have guessed that my passion for plants would take me travelling to visit gardens and learn about gardening?

Favourite 'weed' you're happy to have in your garden *Geranium robertianum* has a special place in my garden. From growing between brick walls in London, it has come with me to Essex. Its dainty pink blooms and delicate leaves bring a touch of wild beauty, reminding me of nature's resilience and the simple joys found in unexpected places.

One thing every gardener can do to be more sustainable Speak to your neighbours. Foster a sense of community by sharing knowledge, seeds, plants and resources.

Favourite planting style I enjoy the mixed borders of cottage-style gardens, especially when they bring to life the gardener's own personality, creativity and quirky touches.

What principles guide your attitude to gardening? Remember that you are never alone in a garden. Even in moments of solitude, you are part of something greater. Plant for pollinators and caterpillars, build habitats and share the garden with them. Be artistic, be creative.

Instagram @adam_stoter

> You are never alone in a garden. Even in moments of solitude, you are part of something greater. Plant for wildlife, build habitats and share the garden

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO MALVERLEYS GARDEN IN HAMPSHIRE WHERE THIS PORTRAIT WAS TAKEN

Waste not, nice plot

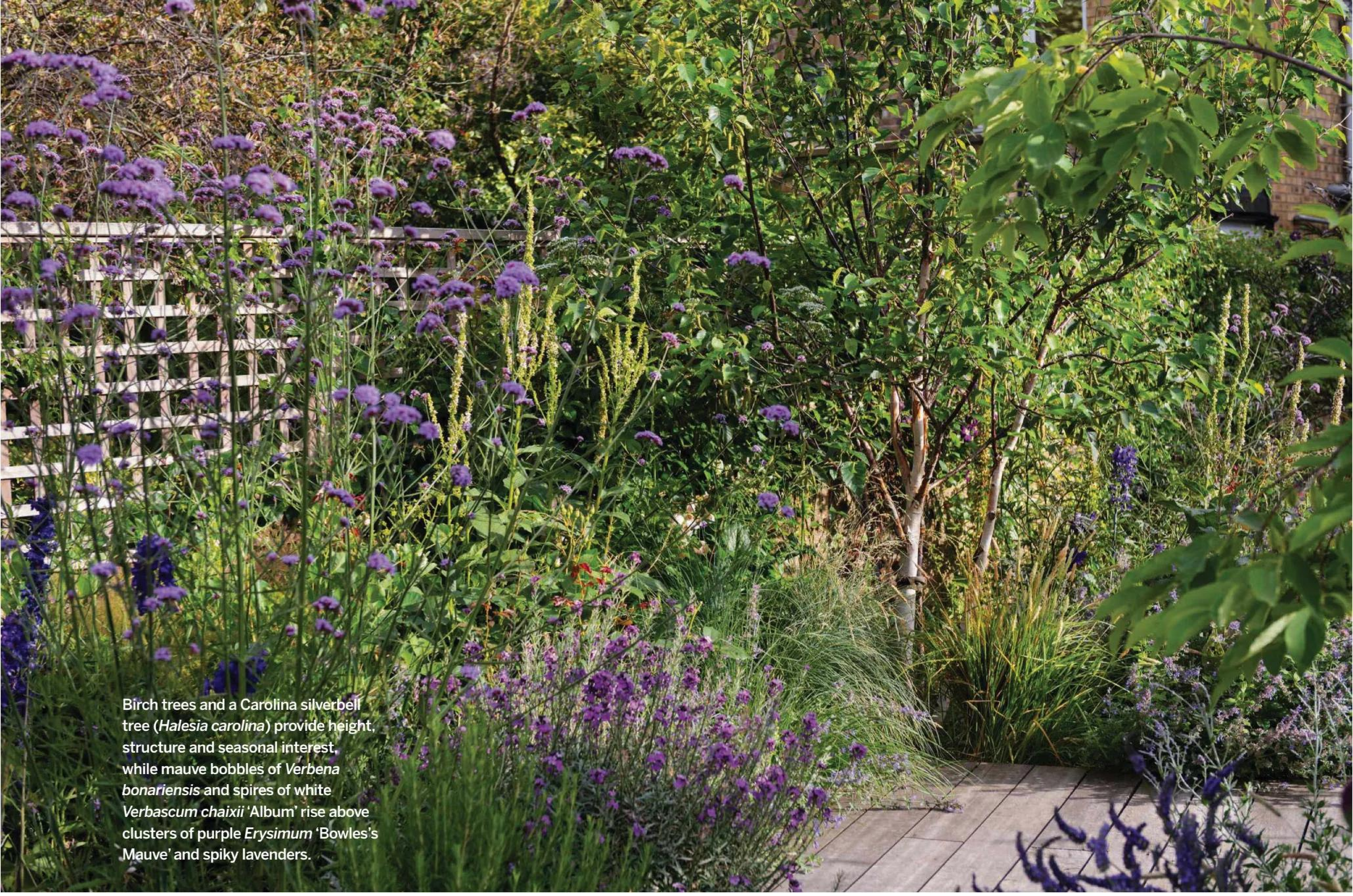
Designer Miria Harris gave herself the challenge of a no-skip, zero-waste project, giving away, recycling or reusing everything in this back garden before transforming it into a space her client could love

WORDS **ZIA ALLAWAY** PHOTOGRAPHS **RACHEL WARNE**

IN BRIEF

What Sustainably designed and built small city garden.
Where London.
Size 15m x 6m.
Soil London clay augmented with organic matter.
Climate Temperate.
Hardiness zone USDA 9.

Reclaimed timber boards and a confection of pastel blue, pink and white perennials and grasses replaced the tropical-style planting and composite deck that Miria and her client Nicky were able to give away after posting on social media.



Birch trees and a Carolina silverbell tree (*Halesia carolina*) provide height, structure and seasonal interest, while mauve bobbles of *Verbena bonariensis* and spires of white *Verbascum chaixii* 'Album' rise above clusters of purple *Erysimum* 'Bowles's Mauve' and spiky lavenders.

When planning a new garden, top of the list for many owners is a sustainable, plant-rich sanctuary that both they and the local wildlife can enjoy. This was the brief given to designer Miria Harris by her client Nicky, who had recently moved to a Victorian town house in east London with a small, north-facing garden. However, upon visiting the site, Miria was faced with a dilemma she knew would be difficult to resolve.

"I had designed a naturalistic garden for Nicky a few years earlier, filled with roses and perennials in soft, pastel shades, which she loved. She asked me to recreate this aesthetic in her new place, and while that was feasible, there was a problem," explains Miria. "The previous owners had obviously spent a considerable amount on the existing mature garden, so while the tropical-style planting, composite deck and raised concrete terrace were not to Nicky's taste, it would have been incredibly wasteful to put them all in a skip."

Miria says that this is the challenge designers often face when installing a new garden, and one she always struggles with. "The horticultural industry is surprisingly unsustainable at times, and it can be frustrating watching the skips mount up. So, for this garden, I wanted a different strategy." After talking to Nicky about how they could remove the old garden, they came up with a plan to give it away. The existing plants, which included *Tetrapanax papyrifer,* bananas (*Musa basjoo*), bamboos and ornamental grasses, many of which have a high retail value, were removed by a team of landscapers and bagged up into biodegradable sacks. The deck was also carefully dismantled so that it could be reused, while the concrete terrace would form part of the new design. Miria then posted a free plant and material giveaway on social media and set out a stall in front of the house. "Within 48 hours, everything had gone. Community gardens and private owners were the main beneficiaries, and the deck went to a handyman Nicky knows who installed it at his home, together with the pergola we didn't want."

The next challenge was to future-proof the new garden, using materials from the existing plot that Miria was unable to give away, and sourcing reclaimed timber for the decks and walkway she had designed. "I wanted to ensure that we were not buying more unsustainable materials that could be trashed by future owners in years to come," she says. "I looked around for timber and found just what we wanted at Ashwells, which specialises in reclaimed wood. We chose ekki, a highly durable African hardwood made from a slow-growing rainforest tree. It's not sustainable and is no longer sold in the UK, but this particular timber had been removed from an old roof terrace on a high-rise apartment block because it posed a fire risk." She also secured some reclaimed yellow balau for the fencing from the same supplier.

Broken bricks and old slate chippings were specified as a sub-base to secure the timber walkway, and the concrete platform, which would have been difficult and costly to remove, was hidden beneath the deck at the back of the garden. Miria was determined not to introduce any plastic or additional concrete into the garden and used long, galvanised-metal ground screws to support the deck.

Water is another precious commodity that Miria strives to conserve. "I often incorporate ways of recycling rainwater into my designs, sometimes by harvesting it, or, as we did here, by redirecting the runoff from the downpipes into the garden, instead of the mains water drain. This has consequences, of course, and the area close to the outlet is much wetter than the beds further away, which I've reflected in the choice of plants for the different spaces. We also retained the original land drain under the deck next to the house to make the garden flood resistant." ▷

Recycling the garden really wasn't as difficult as I thought it would be. I would definitely encourage more people to do this and reduce the waste going to landfill

Dark-leaved *Heuchera* 'Mocha', purple *Geranium* Rozanne (= 'Gerwat'), and the New Zealand blue grass *Poa labillardierei* spill from the beds, creating a ruffle of colour and texture alongside the timber walkway.

Miria's 10 tips for creating a no-waste garden

1. Think about how to minimise waste at the design stage. If you remove something, consider how it can be repurposed or, if you have biodegradable waste, such as plants or wood, incorporate it where it can naturally decay on site.
2. Embrace lumps, bumps and level changes, and include unwanted materials and vegetation in the substrate of the garden.
3. Reusing and recycling aren't the only way to avoid waste. To start from scratch, use social media to organise a plant sale/swap or giveaway.
4. Future-proof your garden by trying to not include materials or furniture you wouldn't want someone else to throw away one day.
5. Have a plan for recycling unwanted plastic pots, either by asking if you can return them to the supplier or donating them to local community gardening projects.
6. Don't throw away broken branches or pruned tree limbs. Make a dead hedge or place them in a quiet area of the garden where the wood can decay and garden creatures can make their homes.
7. Save water. Make your garden as permeable as possible so that excess water can percolate back into the ground.
8. If you do have hard standing, such as a terrace or path, think about angling it so that rainwater runs into a flowerbed or border to irrigate your plants, rather than overloading the drains.
9. Don't be in a rush to tidy up and throw away plant debris in the winter. Spent flowerheads, fallen leaves, berries and seeds provide essential winter habitats and vital food sources for all kinds of wildlife.
10. Take time to consider the design of a new garden, and monitor your existing plot through a whole year to see if you can reuse at least some of the plants, perhaps moving them to different areas of the garden where they may thrive. There is nothing more wasteful than a dead plant.

▷ Miria's new design is a reinvention of Nicky's old garden. The tropical garden has been replaced by a sea of colourful, pollen-rich perennials and wispy grasses, with shrubs, fruit trees, the Carolina silverbell (*Halesia carolina*) and birches providing height and structure. Complementing the soft tones of the timber walkway, which zigzags up to the sunny seating area at the top of the garden, the dense planting also masks the sight lines from the house, encouraging visitors outside to explore.

The soothing colour palette of soft pinks, purples, blues and white creates a sense of calm. Long-flowering perennials, including *Geranium* Rozanne (= 'Gerwat'), *Verbascum chaixii* 'Album', *Delphinium* Blue Bird Group, *Nepeta* 'Six Hills Giant' and *Oenothera lindheimeri* 'Whirling Butterflies' jostle with *Rosa* Desdemona (= 'Auskindling') and colourful leafy shrubs such as *Sambucus nigra* f. *porphyrophylla* 'Eva' and *Cotinus coggygria* 'Young Lady'. Climbers add a vertical dimension, with *Rosa* The Generous Gardener (= 'Ausdrawn'), *Clematis* 'Étoile Violette' and *Solanum laxum* 'Album' performing through late summer and early autumn, while a succession of tulips, alliums and other spring bulbs inject colour earlier in the year.

"The holes left in the beds by the old plants we removed were filled with broken bricks and some of the existing vegetation – which will eventually rot down and release nutrients – together with a little imported soil," explains Miria. "Many of the new plants were bareroot specimens that arrived in compostable bags, but others were delivered in plastic pots, which we needed to dispose of. The coloured types went into Nicky's domestic recycling, while some of the black pots were collected by the nursery for reuse and the rest were sent to a specialist recycling plant that can deal with black plastic."

Reflecting on her achievement in delivering this zero-waste garden, Miria says that while it is not necessarily a cheap option, since many reclaimed materials can be more expensive than new and labour costs may increase when you do things differently, it is helping to save our fragile planet. "What surprised me most was that recycling the garden really wasn't as difficult as I thought it would be, especially with the help of my wonderful contractors Urban Meadows. The fact that all the plants and many of the materials went to new homes in just two days was incredible, and I would definitely encourage more people to do this and reduce the waste going to landfill. It's a win-win, too, as the new owners come away with a bargain, and everyone is happy." □

USEFUL INFORMATION
Find out more about Miria Harris's work at **miriaharris.com**

Reclaimed wood sourced from specialist supplier Ashwell Timber was laid on a sub-base of waste materials from the existing garden, such as old bricks and slate chippings. Nicky used furniture from her old home, including the Mandisa bamboo sofa from Idyll Home, to minimise the carbon footprint.

GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT

Growing your own edible plants is a great way to boost your gut microbiome. Discover expert picks of edimentals that are both beautiful and beneficial

WORDS **SID HILL**

JASON INGRAM

***Hemerocallis* 'Ariadne'**
Day lilies prefer well-drained soil and full sun to part shade. They have edible flowers, leaves, roots and shoots, and are high in mucilage, which helps transfer probiotic microbes to the gut. Height and spread: 90cm x 60cm. RHS H6†.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.
†Hardiness ratings given where available.

Vicia faba
'Crimson Flowered'
Broad beans prefer well-drained, fertile soil and full sun. The beans are great fresh or dried. They are high in fibre and plant protein that supports probiotic microbes in the gut. This heritage variety is highly ornamental. 1m x 30cm. RHS H6.

***Malus domestica* 'Laxton's Superb'**
Apple trees prefer well-drained, fertile soil and full sun. The fruit, eaten fresh or cooked, is a great source of fibre and polyphenols. This dessert apple has a sweet flavour and firm flesh. 6m x 6m. RHS H6.

***Beta vulgaris* 'Alto'**
Beetroot prefers fertile, well-drained soil and full sun. Both leaves and roots are edible. Rainbow colours indicate high levels of polyphenols, which feed the gut microbiome. 'Alto' has cylindrical roots. 30cm x 30cm. AGM*. RHS H3.

JASON INGRAM, ELKE BORKOWSKI / GAP PHOTOS

Creating the Microbiome Garden for RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2024 with my colleague Chris Hull was an extraordinary opportunity to convey the message that we are intrinsically connected to nature. All life is bound together by microbes, the invisible glue that sustains the living world. Trillions of microbes inhabit the air, soil, plants and all animals, including us. These microbes are essential for life, particularly those in the human microbiome, a complex community of microorganisms residing in our digestive tract, on our skin, in our hair and throughout our airways. They play a crucial role in digestion, immune function, and both physical and mental health.

Supporting our microbiome starts with our diet, and the best approach is to consume a diverse mix of plants. Studies recommend eating at least 30 different plants per week – more is even better. Gardening provides a hands-on way to achieve this by growing fruit or vegetables or by making use of other edible plants. You might be surprised by how many edible plants are commonly grown as ornamentals and are likely already growing in your garden.

To understand our microbiome and how we can choose foods that support it, it is helpful to undergo a microbiome test and have it analysed by a microbiome specialist. This will give you an idea of the health of your microbiome and what foods will be most beneficial to you. What is good for one person is not necessarily good for another. A microbiome specialist can provide specific recommendations to support the good microbes in your gut. That said, there are general things we can do to support our microbiome.

The health of the human microbiome starts with the health of the soil. There are trillions of microbes in the soil that are vital for plant health. They nourish plants with nutrients from the soil in exchange for sugars from photosynthesis. When plants are grown in healthy, nutritious and biologically active soils, they offer both prebiotics and probiotics for our microbiome. Prebiotics are the food for the good microbes in our microbiome and probiotics are the microbes known to have beneficial effects on our health.

Growing and harvesting edible plants not only offers the nutrients and health-boosting properties for our microbiome, but also helps transfer beneficial microbes into our gut. This is because there are billions of microbes living in our garden, and harvesting edibles helps increase the diversity of our own microbiome. Research indicates that gardeners typically possess more diverse and healthier microbiomes than non-gardeners, thanks to their exposure to soil, plants and outdoor environments. Simply spending time outdoors can significantly enhance your microbiome, making gardening a rewarding activity for both health and wellbeing.

Eating a wide variety of plants is essential for our health. The different properties of plants interact during

> Simply spending time outdoors can greatly enhance your microbiome, boosting health and wellbeing

To continue turn to page 73 ▷

Helianthus annuus 'Alchemy'
Sunflowers prefer well-drained soil and full sun. Seeds are edible raw or roasted, and are high in prebiotic fibre. Stake tall cultivars to prevent wind damage. 'Alchemy' produces masses of vibrant blooms on bushy, branching stems. 1.5m x 45cm. RHS H4.

Foeniculum vulgare
Fennel thrives in well-drained soil and full sun. The leaves and seeds are edible; it has antimicrobial properties that help maintain a balanced gut microbiome and aid digestion. 1.8m x 45cm. RHS H5, USDA 4a-9b.

Helianthus tuberosus
Jerusalem artichokes thrive in full sun and well-drained soil. The knobbly, elongated, pale-cream tubers are high in the prebiotic fibre inulin, and can be roasted or made into soups. 3m x 1.5m. RHS H5, USDA 3a-9b.

How to create a gut-friendly garden

• **Go no dig** Protecting and nourishing the soil microbiome is crucial for cultivating healthy plants that yield nutritionally dense crops. Start by laying down a thick layer of overlapping cardboard, then cover it with 10cm of compost or wood chips. This method builds soil, provides a habitat for the soil microbiome, and suppresses weeds, reducing the gardener's workload. You can find more information on how to get started with no-dig gardening at gardensillustrated.com/no-dig-gardening

• **Layer your plantings** In nature, plants grow in interconnected communities with multiple vertical layers. By mimicking this system, you can create diverse plant communities that require less maintenance, support increased microbial life and offer varied harvests. Begin with a few different types of plants, and gradually build diversity over a period of time, learning and growing with your successes.

• **Use groundcover plants** Establishing a successful groundcover is one of the most effective ways to reduce ongoing maintenance and create unity within your garden. The repetition of one or a few groundcover plants throughout a bed not only calms the visual aesthetic but also makes your garden feel cohesive and well integrated.

• **Grow edimentals** There are tens of thousands of plants that are both edible and ornamental, often referred to as edimentals. A quick search online might reveal that many of the ornamentals in your garden have a rich history of use as food. Incorporating these plants into your diet is a simple way to support your microbiome with a diverse range of ingredients. You can find more information on the best edimentals to grow at gardensillustrated.com/edimentals

• **Cultivate edible wildflowers** Many native wildflowers are not only edible but also beneficial for wildlife. Plants that retain their wild genes tend to be richer in properties that support our microbiome. Incorporating these wildflowers into your garden provides healthy harvests while promoting biodiversity.

• **Grow a variety of colours** Embrace the 'eat the rainbow' concept by growing a colourful array of plants. Brightly coloured berries, purple carrots and rainbow chard, for example, are packed with polyphenols that feed the beneficial microbes in your gut, helping to support overall health.

JASON INGRAM; JACKY PARKER; STEFFEN HAUSER / BOTANIKFOTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

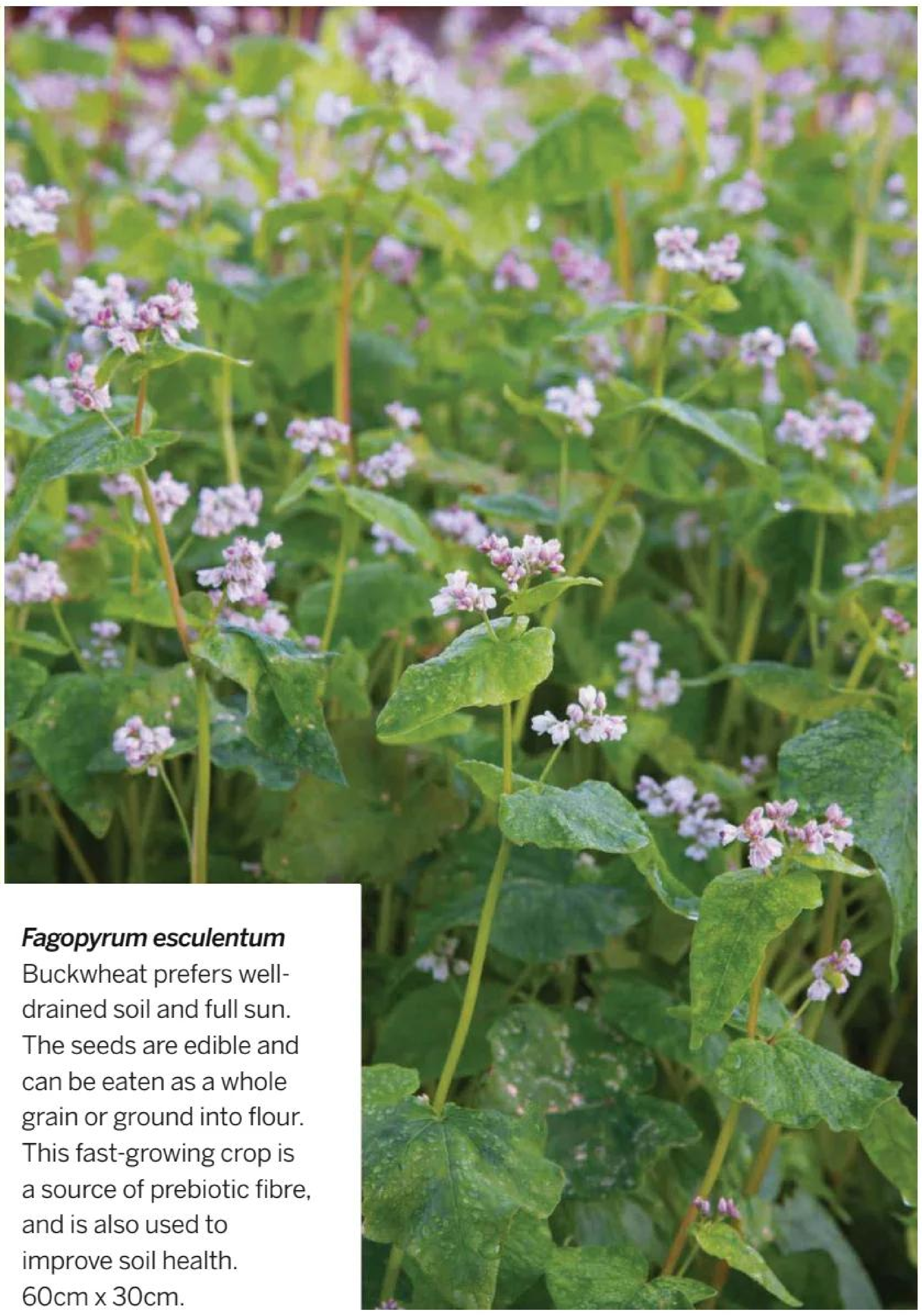
Bistorta officinalis **'Superba'**
Bistorts thrive in moist, well-drained soil and part shade. Leaves are high in plant polyphenols, and can be eaten raw in salads; older leaves need cooking. 90cm x 60cm. AGM. RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b.

Ribes nigrum **'Big Ben'**
Blackcurrants prefer well-drained, fertile soil with a pH of 6-6.5. The tart, nutritious berries are high in polyphenols. 'Big Ben' produces a sizeable, early season crop. Prune annually in winter. 1.5m x 1.5m. AGM. RHS H6.

Rubus fruticosus **'Loch Tay'**
Blackberries prefer well-drained soil and full sun. The nutritious berries are high in prebiotic polyphenols. 'Loch Tay' is a thornless, upright, compact cultivar. 2m x 2m. AGM. RHS H6.

Cichorium intybus
Chicory prefers full sun and well-drained soil. The leaves can be cooked or used fresh in salads, and the roots can be used as a coffee substitute. Thrives in dry, sun-baked conditions. 1.2m x 30cm. RHS H5, USDA 3a-8b.

JASON INGRAM; MATTHEW TAYLOR / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; CLAIRE HIGGINS / GAP PHOTOS; EMILIA KUN / GETTY IMAGES; FLORAPIX / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; FIONA LEA / GAP PHOTOS.



Malva moschata
A beautiful wildflower with pale-pink or white blooms, musk mallow prefers well-drained soil and full sun. The leaves are high in mucilage and both leaves and flowers are edible. Grows extremely well from seed. 90cm x 60cm. RHS H5, USDA 3a-8b.

Fagopyrum esculentum
Buckwheat prefers well-drained soil and full sun. The seeds are edible and can be eaten as a whole grain or ground into flour. This fast-growing crop is a source of prebiotic fibre, and is also used to improve soil health. 60cm x 30cm.

▷ digestion, providing greater health benefits than if eaten alone. A good mix of fresh fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds, grains and beans offers all the necessary ingredients to keep our personal microbes healthy, which in turn keeps us healthy.

Very colourful fruits and vegetables tend to be high in polyphenols – plant defense properties that are particularly good for our microbiome. Currants, beetroot and blackberries are good examples. We also need to consume high-fibre plants such as grains, beans and root vegetables to keep our microbes happy and our digestion functioning well. Jerusalem artichokes, broad beans and buckwheat are all great fibre sources.

When creating an edible garden, we can be imaginative with the layout. There's no need to stick to regimented lines, as often seen in vegetable gardens (unless that is what you want). We can mix edibles and colourful vegetables among existing ornamental plants. We can layer our plantings to mimic how plants grow in nature. You could add edible wildflowers to an existing border, combine them into a wildflower meadow or design an edible meadow.

Chicory, musk mallow and bistort are some of my favourite edible wildflowers for a wide range of growing conditions and offer health-boosting harvests. Chicory has edible leaves and roots, which are high in the prebiotic fibre inulin, and it produces beautiful, light-blue flowers on tall stems. I like to grow it in naturalistic plantings, among ornamental grasses or within wildflower meadows.

> Very colourful fruit and vegetables tend to be high in polyphenols, good for our microbiome

If you have an existing mixed border or space for a new bed, you could build up layers of an edible forest garden with a groundcover of low-growing plants such as strawberries and clumps of edible perennials such as Jerusalem artichokes and asparagus, and add fruit-producing shrubs such as currants, gooseberries or raspberries. Grow these around an apple tree and you have the structure of an edible forest garden.

Creating a microbiome garden is a journey that invites creativity and exploration. Start simple, experiment with combining edible plants in your garden, and gradually build a diverse, thriving community. Not only will you benefit from the nutritious harvests, but you'll also contribute to the health of the wider ecosystem. □

Sid Hill is an ecological gardener and designer.

Where to see and buy
- **Beth Chatto's Plants and Gardens** Clacton Road, Elmstead Market, Elmstead, Colchester, Essex CO7 7DB. bethchatto.co.uk
- **Chiltern Seeds** Tel 01491 824675, chilternseeds.co.uk
- **Frank P Matthews** Berrington Road, Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire WR15 8TH. Tel 01584 812800, frankpmatthews.com
- **Kings Seeds** Monks Farm, Coggeshall Road, Kelvedon, Colchester, Essex CO5 9PG. Tel 01376 570000, kingsseeds.com

GARDENS ILLUSTRATED TAKES NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR MISIDENTIFICATION OF EDIBLE PLANTS. PLEASE ALWAYS CHECK, RESEARCH AND BE SURE BEFORE HARVESTING AND EATING WILD OR ORNAMENTAL PLANTS

NO ENTRY
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TANGERINE DREAM

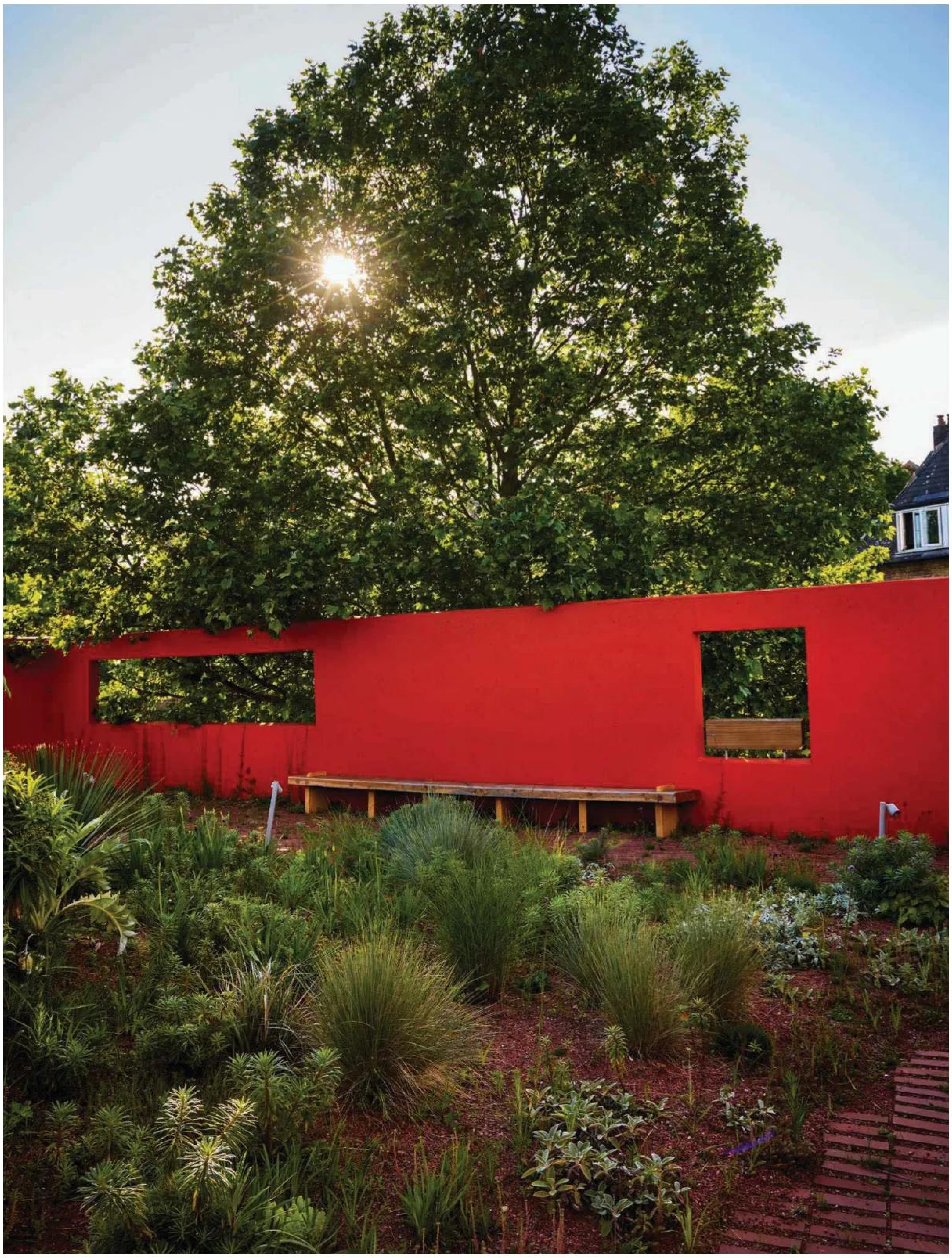
On the edge of one of London's busiest roundabouts, Nigel Dunnett has created exciting combinations of drought-tolerant plants for a roof garden that is as unexpected as it is joyful

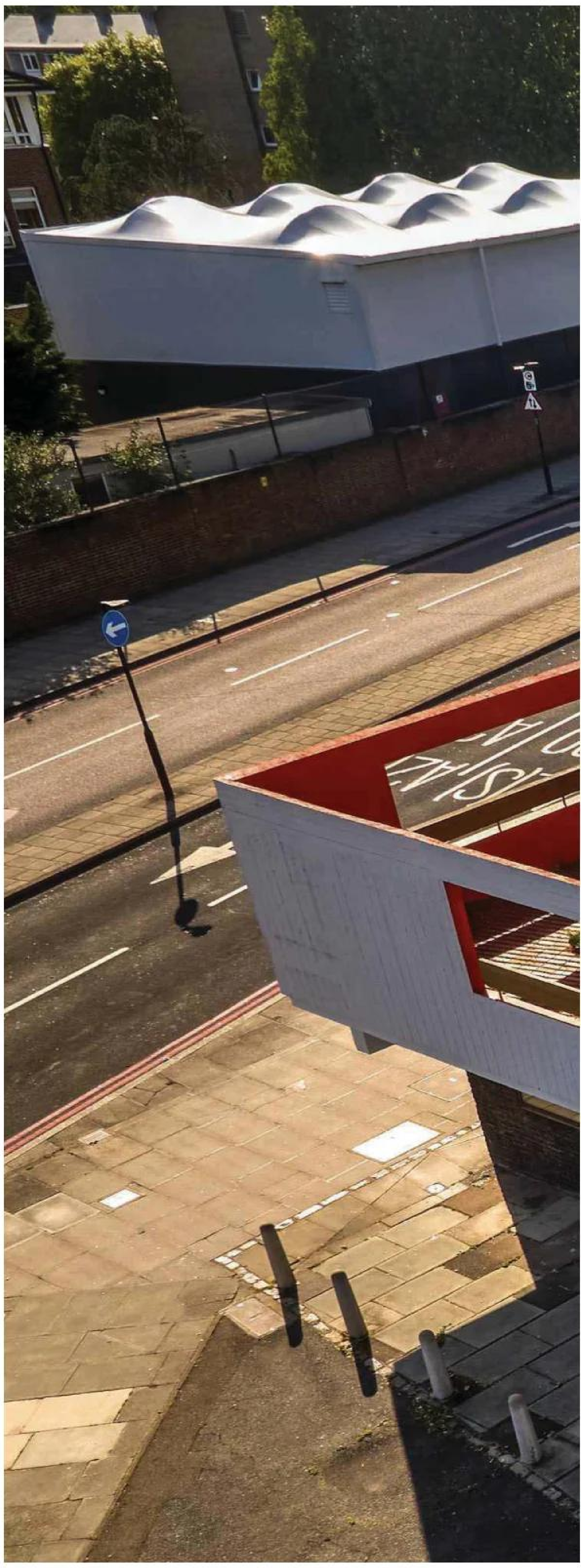
WORDS **NATASHA GOODFELLOW** PHOTOGRAPHS **ALISTER THORPE**

IN BRIEF

What Public community rooftop garden designed by Sanchez Benton architects with planting design by Nigel Dunnett.
Where London.
Size Approximately 400 square metres.
Soil Green roof substrate including 20 per cent organic matter, minimum depth 10cm.
Climate Temperate, but with extreme heat and drought in summer.
Hardiness zone USDA 9.

Built in the 1960s, Peveril Gardens was once a podium space accessible only to the residents of Peveril Tower via a raised walkway. The new design retains this link, while also opening it up to the general public, thanks to a flight of stairs (flanked by two orange walls) from the street. With bold planting and bright colours, it creates an uplifting scene, a world away from the streetscape below.



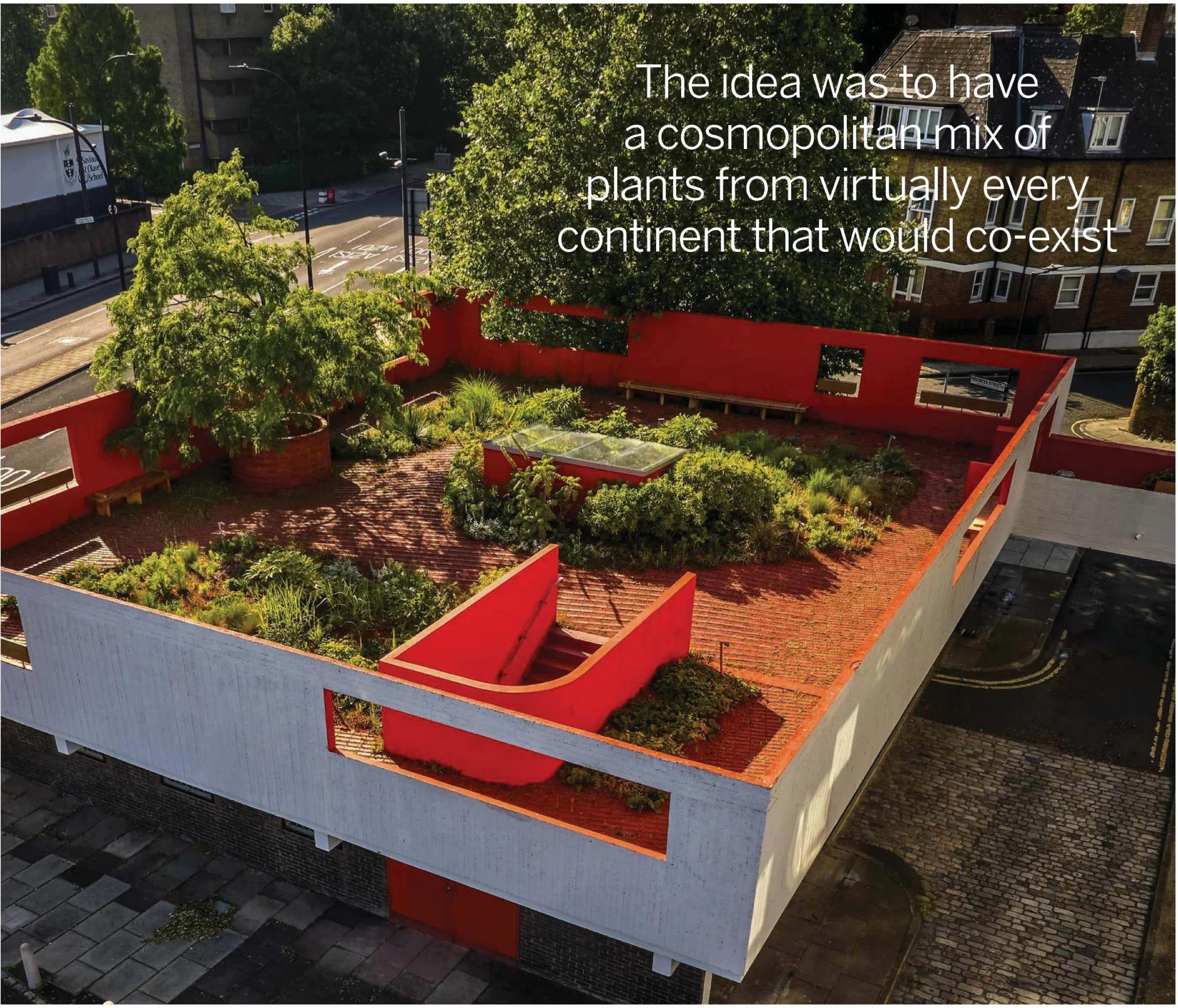


The benches were designed by Mexican artist Gabriel Kuri, with whom Nigel collaborated on the project. In the foreground, the plants – including euphorbias, grasses and cardoons – were chosen primarily for their foliage and ability to withstand drought. A pipe irrigation system on a timer helped them to establish; now they must fend for themselves.

When is a garden not a garden? When it's a work of art. Peveril Gardens, a rooftop community space built above some formerly derelict garages, next to one of London's busiest roundabouts, is just such a place. From the drab surrounding streets below, it is easy to miss. But venture up the stairs through the bright-orange doors and you're in a different world entirely – a world of colour, heat and interest that brings to mind the buildings of Mexican architect Luis Barragán. The space is a simple rectangle, its four tangerine walls pierced on all sides by long windows. Underfoot, terracotta brick pathways continue and intensify the orange theme, winding around the planting beds whose inhabitants – spiky dasylirions, *Melianthus major* and spiralling euphorbias – cast their seductive shadows against the walls. Outside, sirens clang and the traffic roars; up here, it's the sound of grasshoppers you hear first. If the definition of art is something that transports you, this ticks the box.

The garden is a collaboration between architectural practice Sanchez Benton, planting designer Nigel Dunnett and Mexican artist Gabriel Kuri, and is the result of a design competition organised by Southwark Borough Council for an art commission to improve this part of the borough. "Rather than thinking about an artwork or sculpture that could be put into a public place, the architects had the idea that the garden itself would be the artwork," says Nigel, who was approached primarily because of his experience in creating gardens at the Brutalist Barbican complex across the river Thames. "Sanchez Benton realised there was a lack of good-quality green space in the area and thought there was an opportunity to create something that engaged with more people in the community than the existing building did."

Built in 1964, the original structure was conceived as a 'playground in the sky' for the residents of the



The idea was to have a cosmopolitan mix of plants from virtually every continent that would co-exist

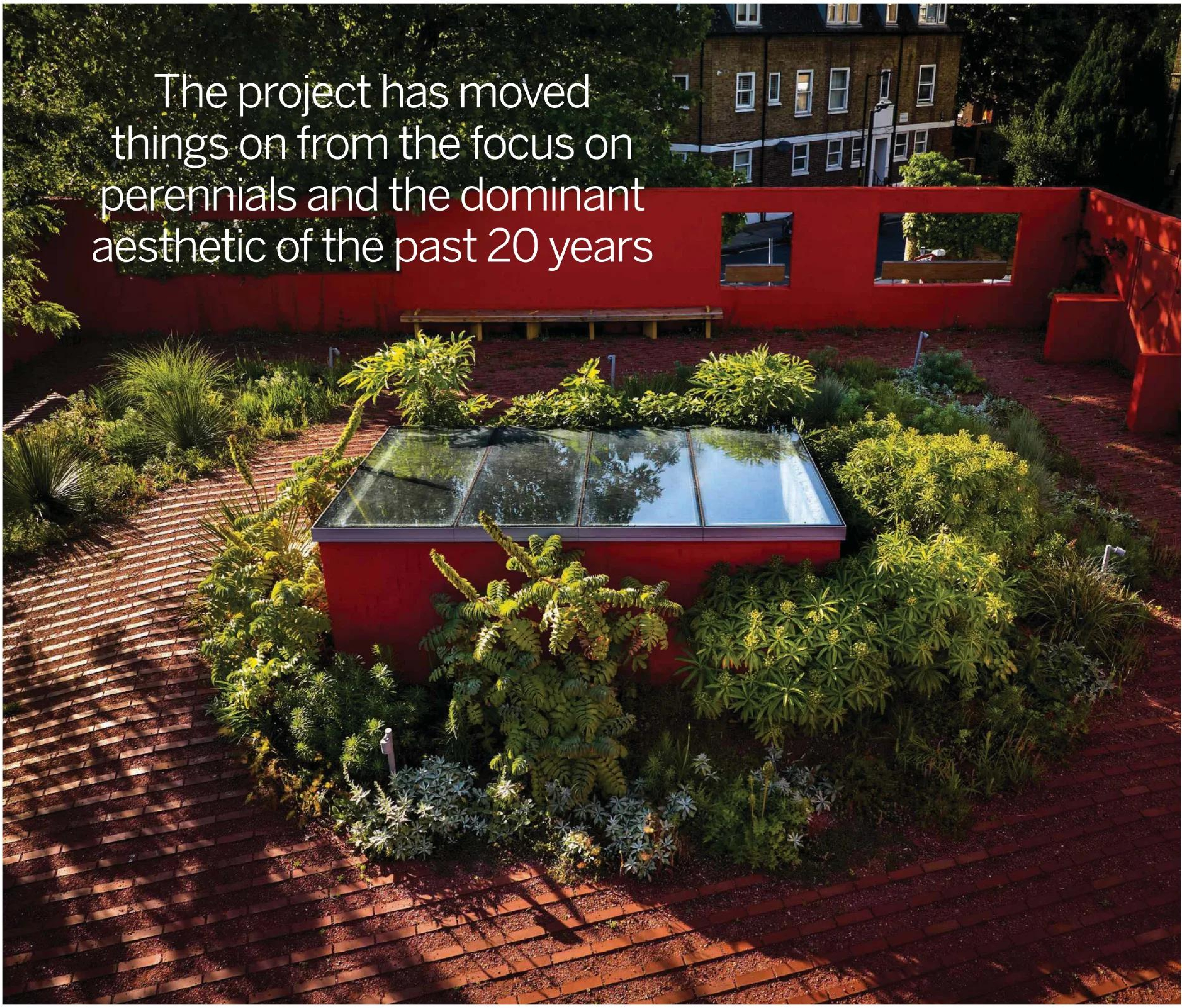
adjacent Peveril House tower block, accessible via a raised footbridge. By the early 2000s, however, the garages and bin store beneath had fallen into disrepair, the garden was barely used and the entire podium was threatened with demolition. Where some might have been underwhelmed by this unprepossessing place and its dispiriting location, Nigel was excited. "I have a real love of Modernist architecture and the vision and idealism behind it," he says. "And I really loved the idea of this protected 'playspace'."

He also loved the proposed design – a dynamic mix of gently undulating topography and bold piercings of the roof, all designed to connect the building with its surroundings. One piercing accommodates the new staircase from the street. Another allows a gleditsia tree to grow up from ground level, and a central skylight illuminates the building below, now occupied by Forma, a contemporary arts organisation.

Nigel's initial planting ideas drew on his experience at the Barbican, using a palette of sustainable and climate-adapted flowering perennials and grasses that would thrive in the shallow, free-draining substrate, but, to his surprise, the architects wanted something quite different. "They referenced monastic cloister gardens and the dramatic foliage seen in Dan Pearson's garden at the nearby Garden Museum – a very enclosed, sheltered space quite different from this sun-scorched roof garden with its thin soil and exposed site," says Nigel. He refers to this initial stumbling block as one of the high points of the project. "In having to come up with low-maintenance foliage plants that would survive in these conditions, it really challenged me and has changed the way I think. It's moved things on from the focus on perennials and the aesthetic that's been dominant for the past 20 or 30 years."

A loose mix of evergreen, drought-tolerant shrubs including *Dasylirion acrotrichum*, euphorbias (*E. mellifera* and *E. characias* subsp. *wulfenii*), *Melianthus major* and *Fatsia polycarpa* Green Fingers provided the solution, with other drought-tolerant ▷

The garden is on the corner of the busy Bricklayers' Arms roundabout and flyover, named after the coaching inn that once stood on the site. The use of bricks is a nod to this history. The design has stayed close to the original, reusing and refurbishing the existing structure rather than starting again. Nigel chose the gleditsia tree (on the left) "for its dappled canopy and its lovely golden-yellow young leaves in spring, which look fantastic against the tangerine walls".



The project has moved things on from the focus on perennials and the dominant aesthetic of the past 20 years

While you might expect a rooftop garden to be flat, this one actually undulates gently, thanks to sculpted layers of lightweight insulation material lying beneath the brick and concrete screed. In certain areas, this has enabled the planting depth to be increased, allowing for larger, deeper-rooted plants such as *Euphorbia mellifera*, *Melianthus major* and the fig tree, *Ficus carica*.

▷ plants including *Dianthus carthusianorum*, *Liatris spicata* and various sedums, salvias and thymes woven through the spaces. The tree, envisioned by Gabriel Kuri almost as a flag for the garden, is a *Gleditsia triacanthos* f. *inermis* 'Sunburst', which, at around 15m tall, needed to be craned into position.

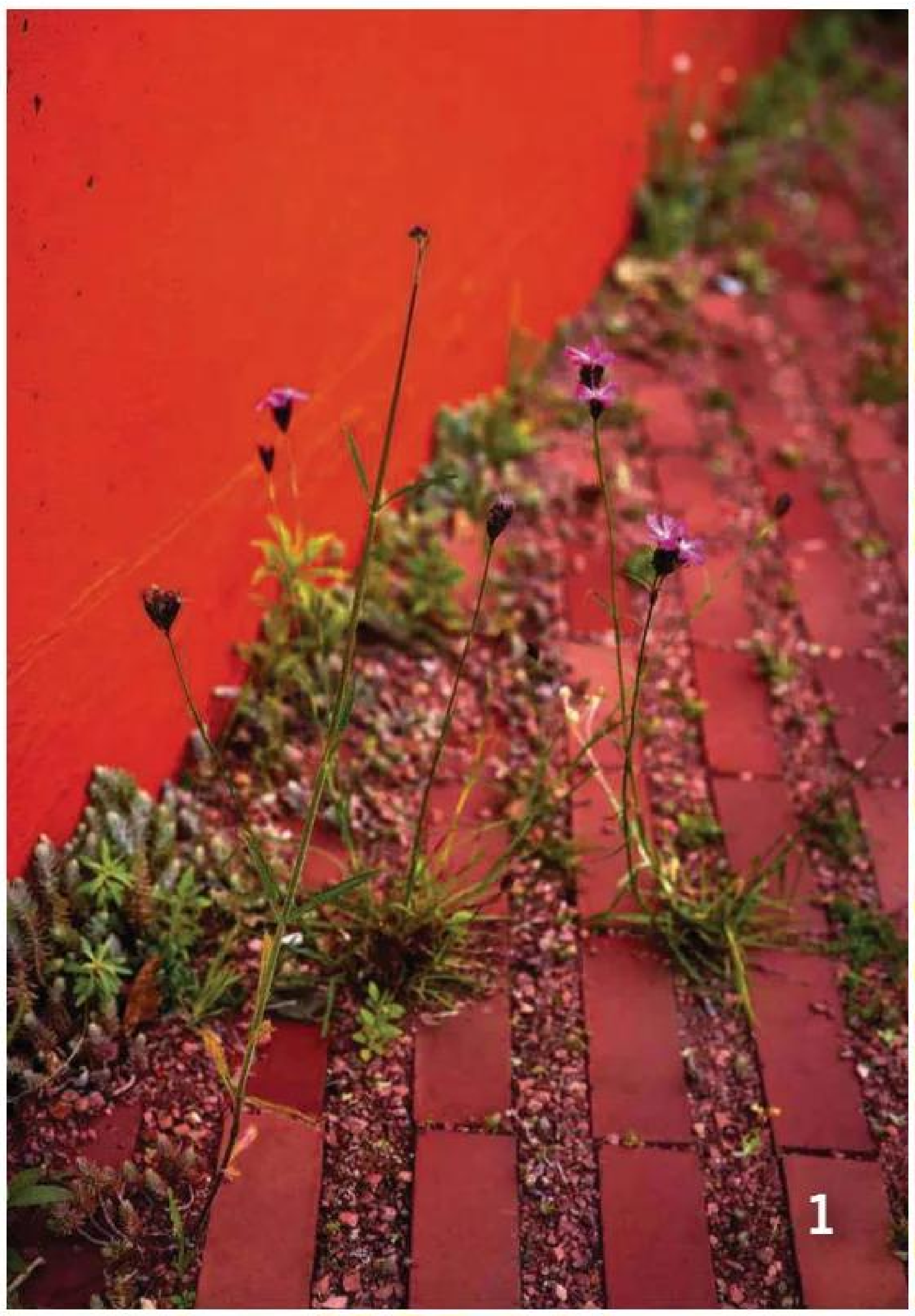
To reflect the diverse local community, Nigel has selected plants from all over the world: kniphofias from Africa, nandinas and bergenias from Asia, and astelias from New Zealand, to name but a few. "I thought it would be a nice metaphor to have a cosmopolitan mix of plants from virtually every continent that would come together and co-exist," he says. In a similar spirit, self-seeders and blown-in plants are also encouraged, not least by the design, which uses the same gravel emulsion substrate in the beds as in the brick-striped pathways.

"If something looks good and it makes its home here, it's welcome," says Nigel, adding that he's excited to see how the space will develop its own dynamic over time. "Where the paths get lots of usage, self-seeders won't survive, but in other areas they'll establish and thrive."

Key in this process is local resident and dancer Richard Court, who manages the group of volunteers that help maintain the garden for the benefit of the wider community. This includes everyone from the residents of Peveril House (who may come and go as they please) and anyone who wanders in during the public opening hours, to school groups and visitors to other cultural events organised by Forma. "The usual reaction is one of surprise," says Nigel. "It's just so completely unexpected and joyful." □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Peveril Gardens is at 140 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4GW. Open Tuesdays – Fridays, 10.30am-5pm. Find out more about Nigel Dunnett's work at **nigeldunnett.com**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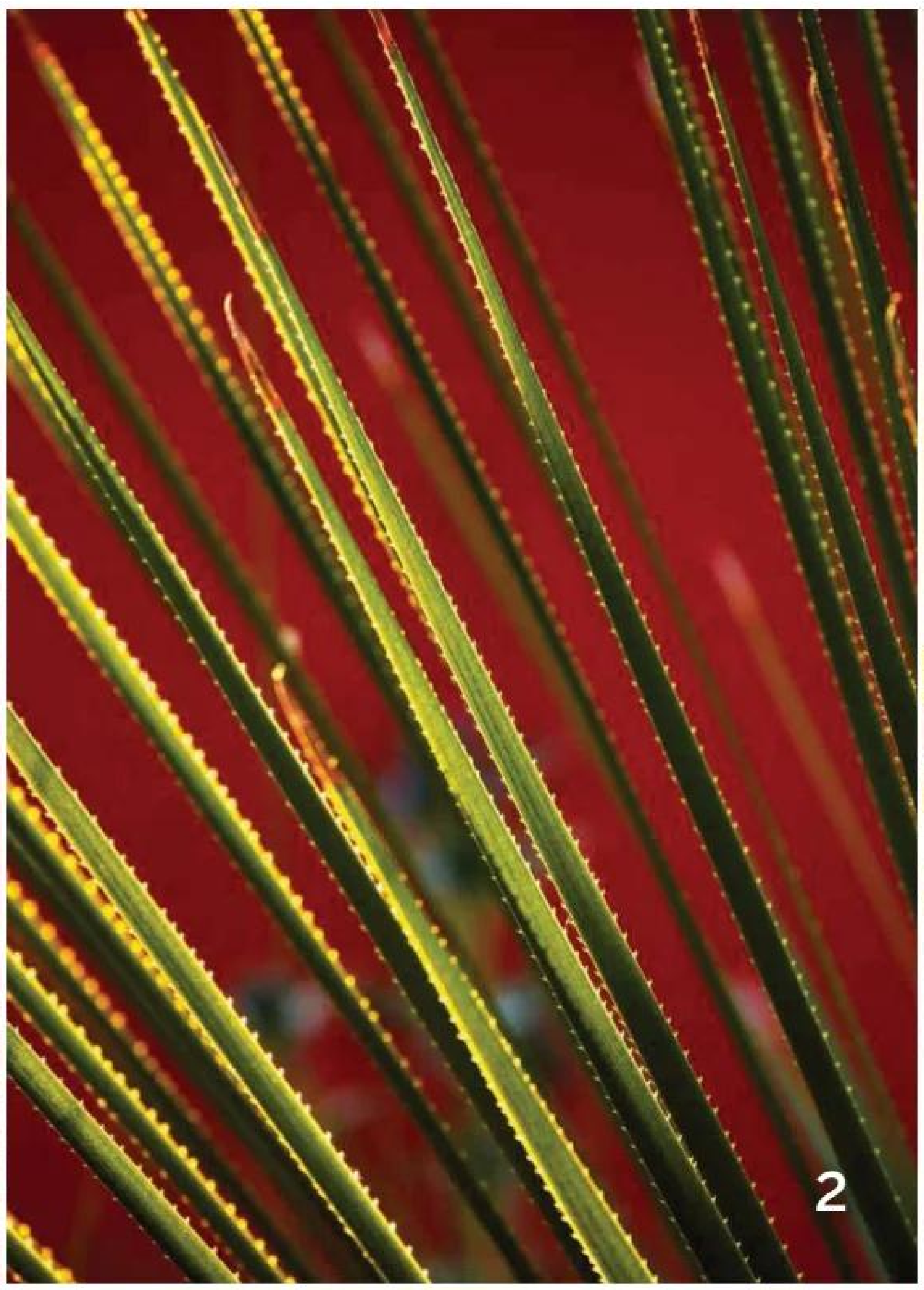
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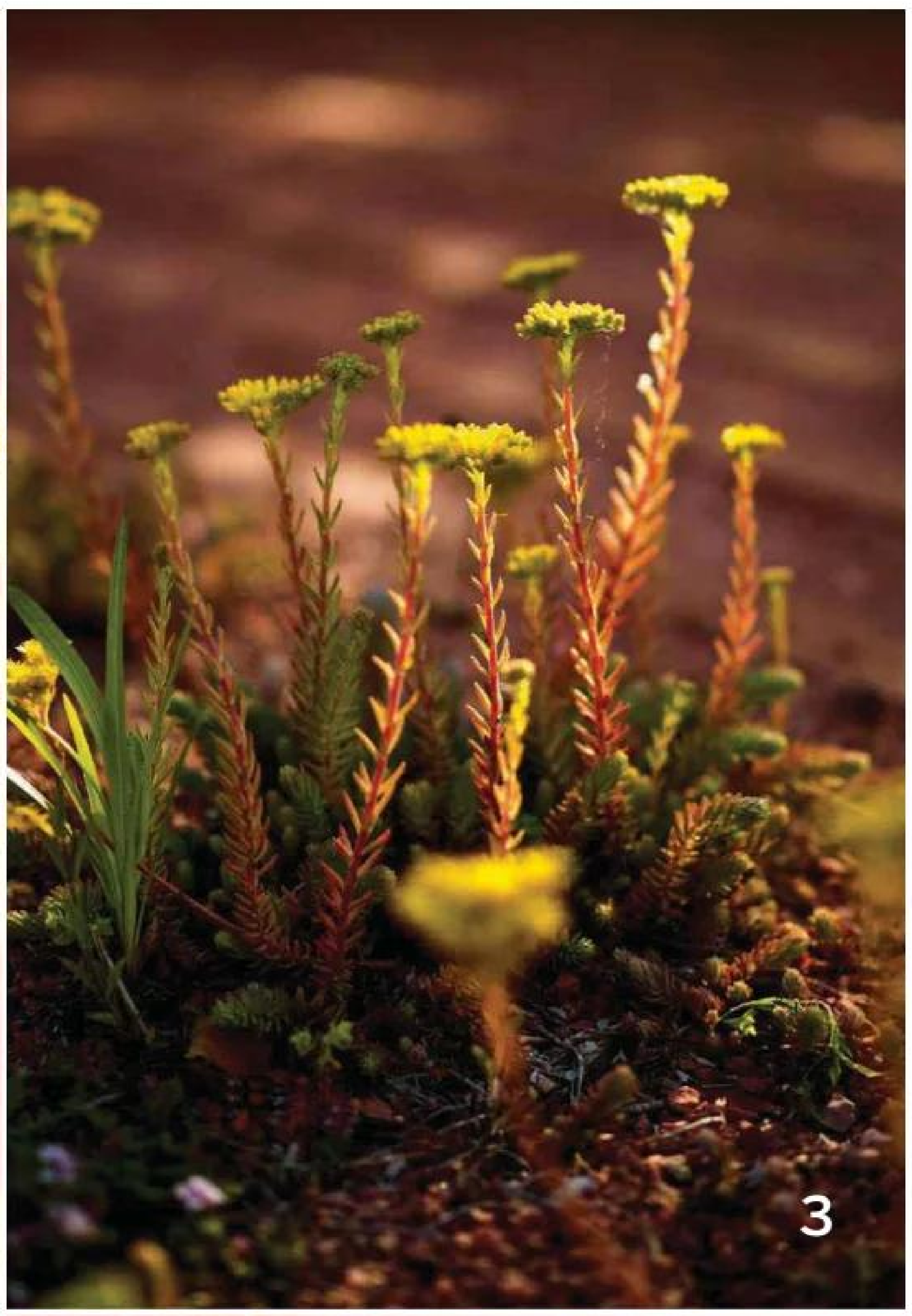
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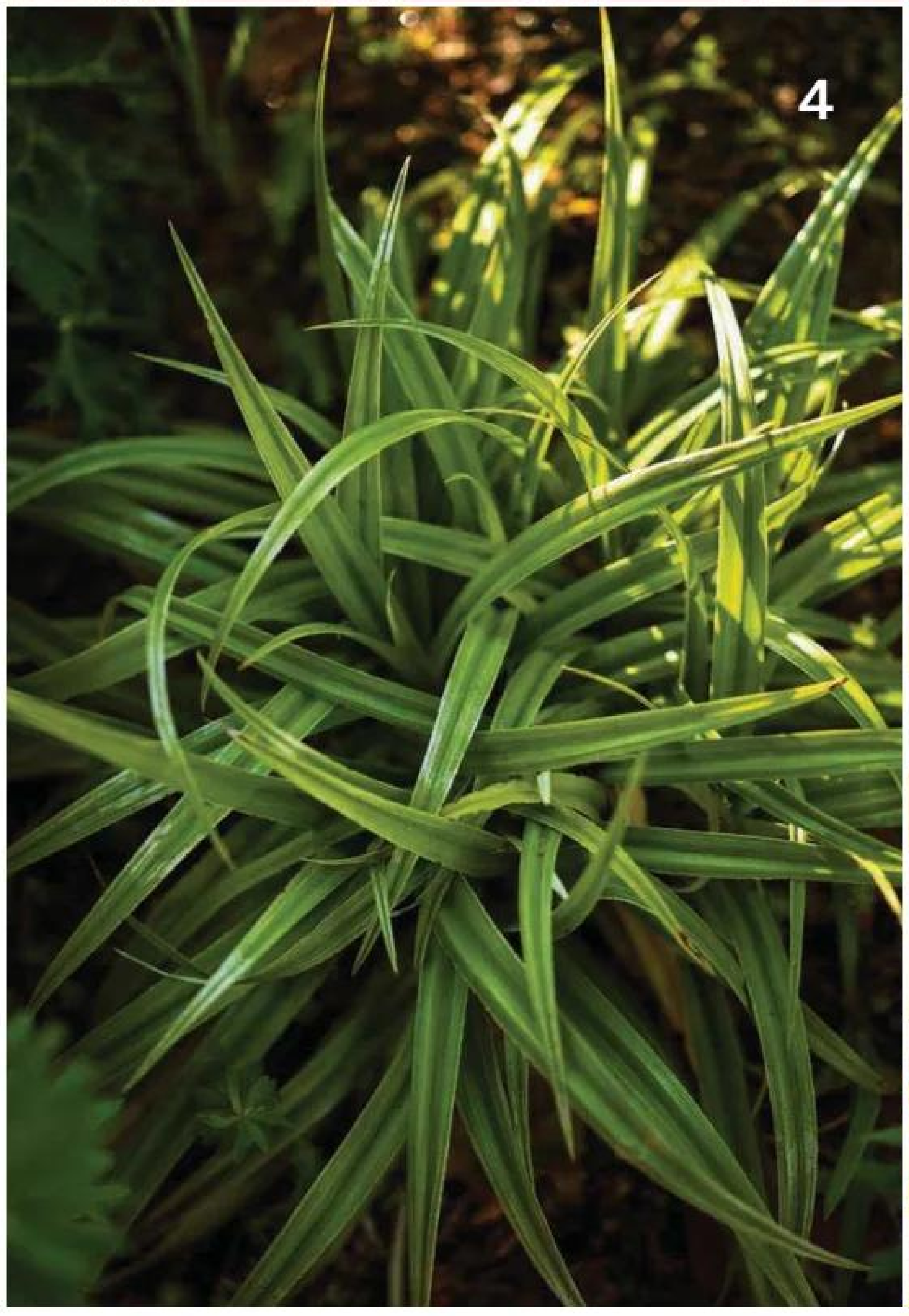
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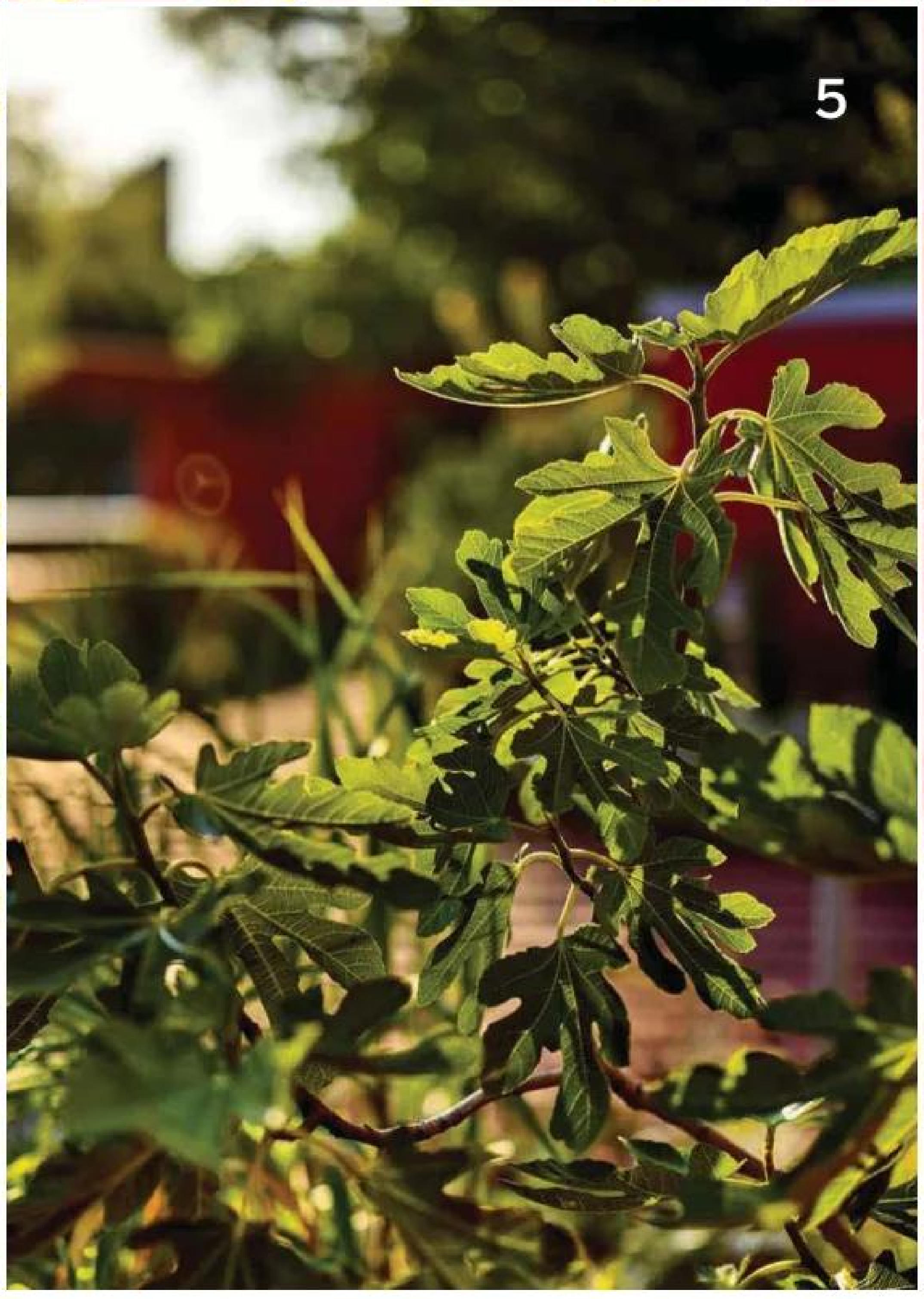
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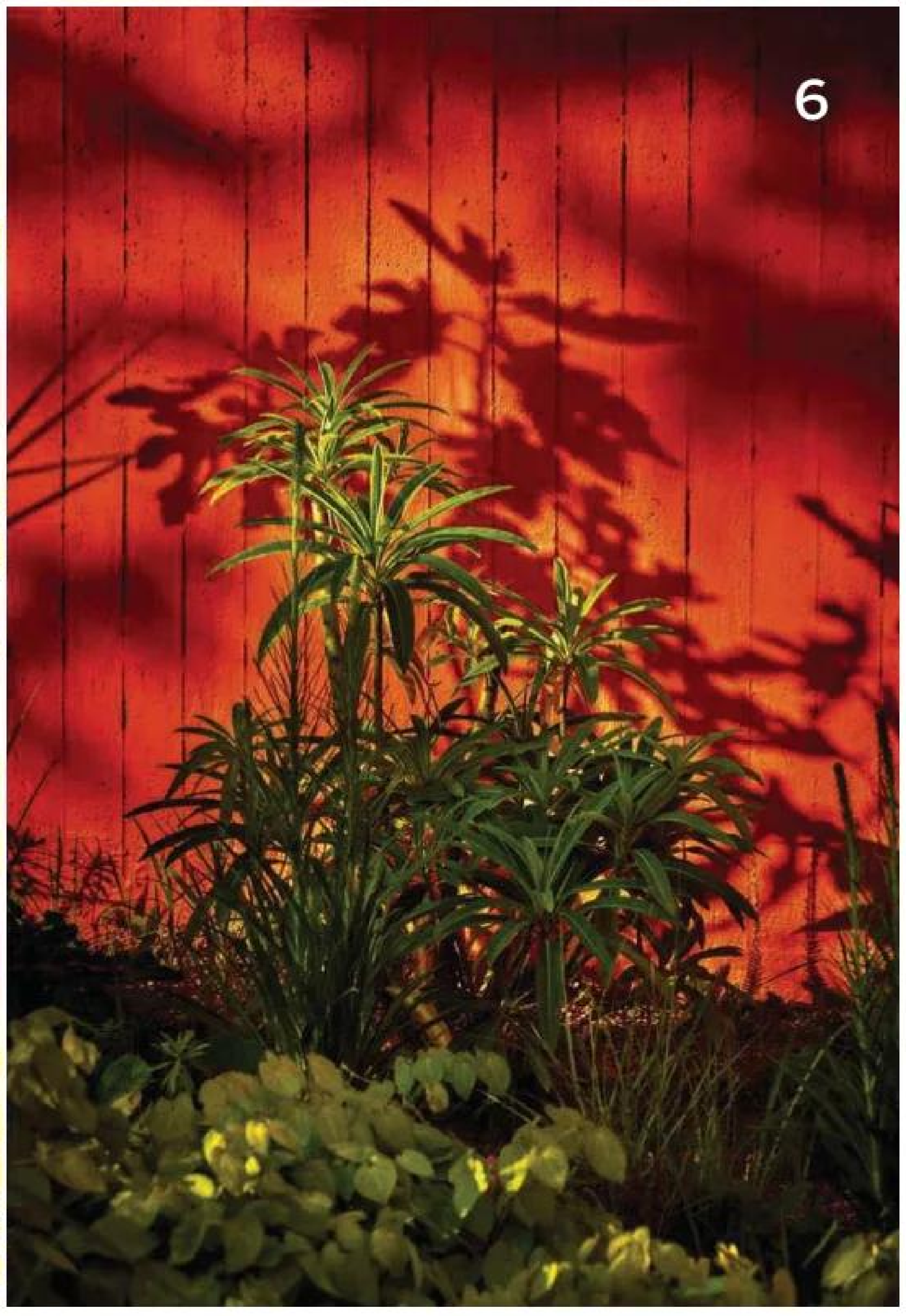
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6 KEY DROUGHT-TOLERANT PLANTS

1 *Dianthus carthusianorum*
"I love the way this little perennial is already venturing out of the beds and making itself at home in the paths," says Nigel. The single, pink flowers sit on wiry stems that emerge from a tight clump of narrow, green leaves. Height and spread: 60cm x 20cm. RHS H7[†].

2 *Dasylirion acrotrichum*
The spiky, domed hemispheres of this evergreen succulent sub-shrub make such a statement in the garden. The leaves have hooked margins and terminal tufts, and it sends up a tall spike of white, star-shaped flowers in summer. 1.2m x 1m. RHS H2.

3 *Sedum rupestre*
Much hardier than it looks, this little plant makes an evergreen mat, throwing up tall stems of yellow flowers in summer. A prolific self-seeder, it can make itself at home in the tightest nooks and crannies. 15cm x 60cm. RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b.

4 *Astelia chathamica*
This evergreen perennial has attractive, silvery, sword-shaped leaves and is happy in sun or shade. Very low maintenance and tough – simply cut back hard if it succumbs to frost and it should grow back. 1.2m x 80cm. AGM*. RHS H3.

5 *Ficus carica*
Another tough-as-old-boots plant that, given sun, will romp away and look after itself entirely. The lobed leaves are attractive and edible (use as a flavouring rather than a foodstuff), as, of course, are the fruits. 3m x 4m. RHS H4, USDA 6a-9b.

6 *Euphorbia mellifera*
With its honey-scented flowers, and long, narrow, acid-green leaves, this large, domed shrub makes a striking talking point in the garden. May need winter protection in very cold gardens. 2m x 2m. AGM. RHS H3.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. [†]Hardiness ratings given where available.

Gardening is good for you

In the first of his new factual column on the benefits of gardening, **Dr Richard Claxton** uncovers all the evidence-based ways it can help your physical health

ILLUSTRATION VICKI TURNER

Gardeners know it, and the research evidence is convincing: gardening is good for you in so many ways. A 2003 Dutch study showed that for every ten per cent increase in regular exposure to gardens or green space, there is a health improvement equivalent to being five years younger. I can't think of any drug that could make such a claim, and if there were such a thing, people would be queuing up to take it.

More than half the UK population are gardeners, and this figure rises as we get older, so it follows that gardening can therefore be beneficial to the health of our ageing population. But we don't need to wait until we're a certain age: school garden projects have shown an impact that can lay the foundations for a healthy life.

Fit, strong and happy

Many studies have shown that gardeners are more physically active than non-gardeners, and a 2018 systematic review confirmed that gardening causes falls in blood pressure, heart rate and body mass index, which protect us from stroke, cardiovascular diseases, obesity, cancers and other diseases.

So how do these benefits actually work? Let's start with the bones: gardening can maintain mobility, and physical exercise is known to enhance bone density and protect against osteoporosis. Stronger bones mean fewer fractures, and bones are also protected by the healthier levels of vitamin D seen in gardeners. This is metabolised into its active form by sun exposure on the skin. And vitamin D has other benefits: reduced levels make us feel low in mood and fatigued – indeed weakness of the muscles is a symptom of vitamin D deficiency.

Muscle strength is further helped by the act of gardening. This is especially beneficial if you have arthritis or other joint problems. In addition, gardening improves cardiorespiratory fitness and burns calories: between 250 and 350 for each hour in the garden. Three hours of gentle work in the garden equates to a hard hour in the gym (and I really hate the gym).

All the while our adrenal glands produce less cortisol – the stress hormone – and endorphins released during exercise give us a buzz too. More gardening could give us much more to be happy about – the Department of Health calculates that a ten per cent increase in average exercise by adults would avoid 6,000 premature deaths and save the NHS £500 million annually.

Boosting our defences

Our immune systems benefit from gardening too, in ways we're only just beginning to comprehend. Cortisol is also an immune suppressant, so less of this helps, and the microbiology of the soil affects our gut health and immune wellbeing. This was originally demonstrated after *shinrin-yoku* (forest bathing) sessions in Japan, and the effects can be seen in blood tests for several weeks afterwards. These effects were reproduced in Finnish kindergarten children whose playground was filled with forest soil and peaty play areas. Subsequently, there was a big jump in the diversity of the children's skin and gut bacteria, and they had markedly higher levels of protective white blood cells and interleukins, which play an important role in immune responses.

The theory is that broader biodiversity of our own skin and gut biome, and the resulting enhanced immune functioning, protect us from immune-modulated diseases such as asthma, allergies, rheumatoid arthritis and Type 1 diabetes. It can also improve our response to infections and our internal ability to detect and destroy early cancers. Conversely, the trend for 'cleaner' environments may explain the rising levels of many of these kinds of illnesses.

A feast for the senses

The way we engage with gardens through our senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch can profoundly affect our physiology. Green is the colour the human eye finds easiest to see. It sits in the middle of the visible spectrum where our perception is at its best. In psychological tests, functional MRIs and real-life assessments, controlling background colours has repeatedly shown green to make us more relaxed, more creative and more positive in our mood. It changes our brainwave activity and reduces blood pressure, pulse rate and muscle tension.

The soundscape in the garden plays a role too. Birdsong has been shown to be our preferred ambient sound, improving cognitive performance and physiological wellbeing, as well as reducing perceived pain. And for our noses there's an aromatherapy cocktail out there, with botanical aromatics, such as terpenes (which include the scents of rosemary, pine, citrus, lavender and rose), and soil-based chemicals, such as geosmin, enhancing our physiological and psychological wellbeing. They reduce adrenaline levels, increase white blood cells and boost brainwave activity.

Toxin trappers

We know that living close to a busy road is linked to an increased risk of death from asthma, as well as increased rates and severity of dementia and cardiovascular disease. Gardens help filter the air pollution that can worsen these diseases. Trees, for instance, remove large quantities of toxins through their foliage, trapping them in leaves that later fall to the ground, where soil microorganisms break them down. It's been estimated that, worldwide, forests offset a quarter of man-made carbon dioxide.

And in our own gardens, trees, hedges and other plants can reduce noise, heat, wind, flooding and soil erosion. Even lawns are helpful, trapping pollutants and passing them on to soil microorganisms, as well as providing recreational space for exercise.

It's clear that there are a multitude of benefits to our physical health and wellbeing that come from gardening – so what are you waiting for? Fortunately, both for society as a whole and for the 87 per cent of us lucky enough to have access to our own outdoor space, the solution to many of our health problems is just there, outside the window, in the garden. □

PORTRAIT BY LISA LINDER

Richard Claxton is a GP, garden designer and founder of green-prescribing network Gardening4Health

EARTHLY CONCERN

Weeds, slugs, birds and mice – all are welcome on Birch Farm in Devon, where **Joshua Sparkes** seeks to respect the local ecosystem and mimic nature in his innovative approach to growing

PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Natural farming proponent Joshua Sparkes picking peas among Birch Farm's diverse polycultures. Flowering weeds and self-seeded annuals fill the beds offering habitats for pollinators and a variety of edibles, including beans, beetroot, peas, kale, lettuce and radishes.

Natural farming is about your own love and passion for food, nature and people, and I now see it more as a personal philosophy than a set of instructions

Facing page Joshua in the fields of Birch Farm with a tray of broad beans and beetroot from third-generation seed. One of the most important lessons of natural farming is that by collecting your own seed you will be able to breed stronger and more resilient crops.

Above left Self-seeded borage (*Borago officinalis*) finds its place among crops. It has to be kept in check before it gets too heavy and collapses in late-summer winds. But it's worth the vigilance for the cucumber-tasting flowers.

Above centre Garlic is a perfect crop for natural farming as it grows well in polycultures and can be stored for winter or fermented for later use.

Above right The glasshouse is surrounded by wild mustard (*Sinapis arvensis*) that will add a greater hardiness to the farm's brassicas through cross pollination.

My natural farming story began while I was serving in the military. It was my return from Afghanistan that was the catalyst for the journey I am currently on. Returning home made me question a lot about myself and made me nostalgic for my childhood, which was spent mostly playing in the woods and meadows around my family home. It was often a place I retreated to in my mind during hard times.

After seeing so much destruction and injustice, I really wanted to nurture and protect the environment I was familiar with as a boy. At the time, I naturally presumed that gardening would protect and defend nature, so I enrolled on a horticulture diploma. I learned the basics I needed, which then led to great opportunities to work and learn in some of the greatest gardens around the world.

I developed the skills and knowledge I needed to care for these gardens, but it always felt that anything too 'wild' or 'messy' was strictly removed, no matter the habitat it created. Chemical management was common, from fungicides to herbicides. Self-sufficiency was seen as impossible and when I questioned any method, the response was, usually, 'That's the way it's always been done' – a phrase I would argue is the most damaging to nature in our society.

I could also sense an underlying sickness. Soil seemed poor even with copious amounts of added compost. Roses still got sick even with the cocktail of sprays, and plants and lawns never seemed fully happy, not to mention the rapid changes in our climate challenging their resilience each year. The desire for this unattainable 'perfection' shared by many gardens, charities and owners was destroying the idea I had of horticulture as a way to protect biodiversity.

This led me to work and study in the USA and Japan. I wanted to compare other horticultural styles to see if they had the answers I was looking for. Compost, soil health and the use of cover crops became the main topic of my time in the USA. I looked into regenerative farming, but I ▷

Above left Tree spinach (*Chenopodium giganteum*) self-seeds freely at Birch Farm. Its purple frills are a beautiful addition to salads.

Above centre Joshua with baby Barney picking peas surrounded by a thriving ecosystem with wildlife and insects.

Above right *Brassica oleracea* 'January King' nestled among aromatic herbs and weeds. Cabbages do really well with competition.

Facing page The potting shed on the farm is used for processing produce and hosting events. It sits in the rubble garden, which was created using more than 380 tonnes of waste from a local demolition to bring greater diversity to the farm's habitats.

▷ found myself questioning the vast amount of inputs required, such as squid ink or crab shells. Surely self-sufficiency was key to sustainability?

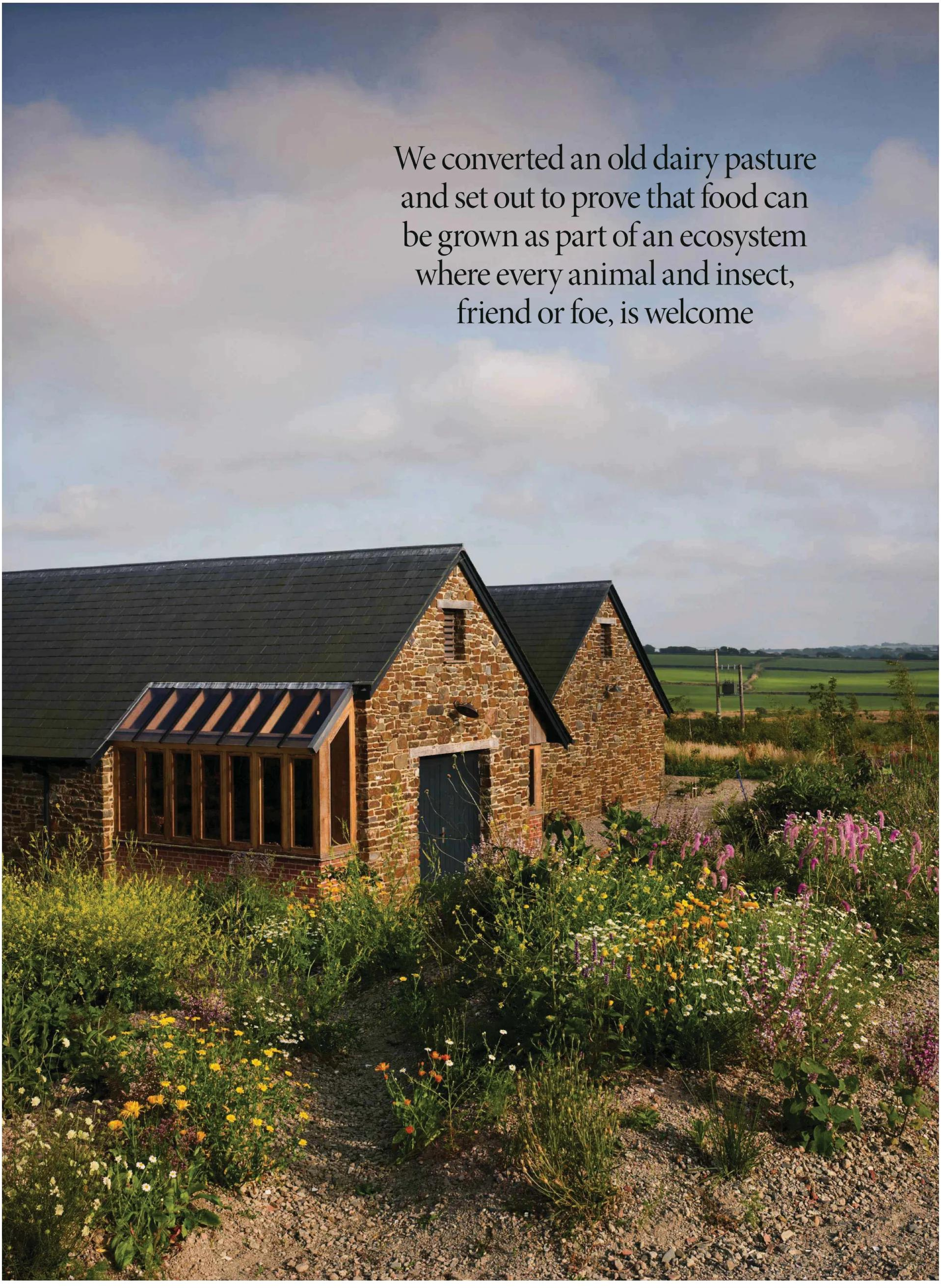
Japan, on the other hand, was everything I hoped for. The people, gardens and landscape still inspire me today. My dream was to learn natural farming, something I had been fascinated by since reading *The One-Straw Revolution* by Masanobu Fukuoka. However, I soon found out that natural farming wasn't a working practice to be scribbled into notebooks. It is a belief or idea that only you can translate for yourself. It's about your own love and passion for food, nature and people, and I now see it more as a personal philosophy than a set of instructions.

Unfortunately, when I returned from Japan, I quickly found myself being told to remove habitat such as leaves from under shrubs. When I asked why, I was told, again, that that's the way it's always been done. Looking back, I think it was in that moment I resolved to dedicate my career to natural farming.

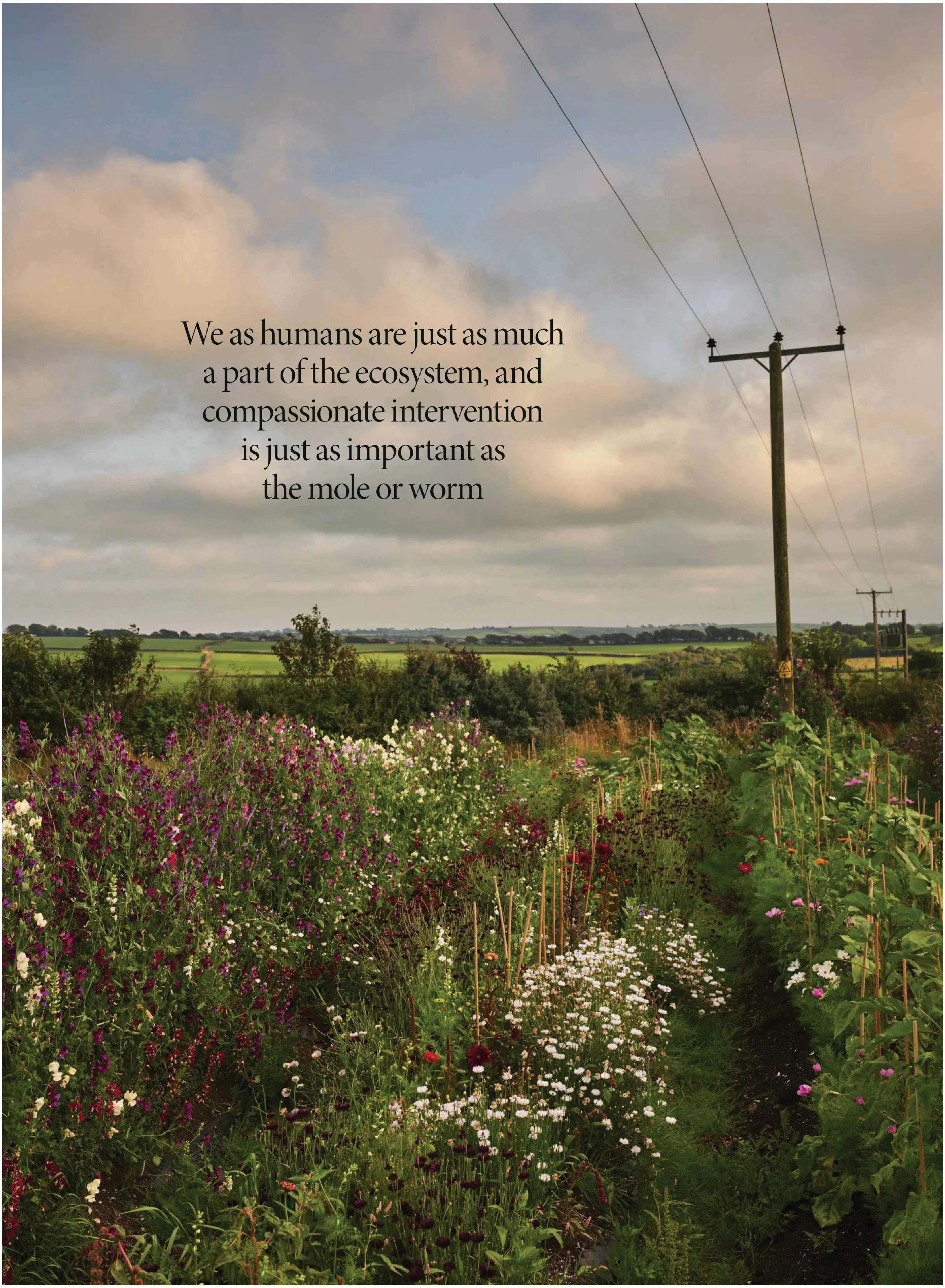
I was very lucky to find an employer in north Devon who would support natural farming, with all its weeds and organised chaos. Birch Farm, part of The Collective at Woolsery, wanted to grow local sustainable produce for the The Farmers Arms pub in the village, and fully understood the importance of biodiversity and climate resilience.

Four years on, our natural farming has gone from strength to strength. We converted an old dairy pasture and set out to prove that food can be grown as part of an ecosystem where every animal and insect, friend or foe, is welcome, and external inputs are kept to a minimum. I am not one for using compost to suppress weeds, as I believe that in doing this, all we are doing is suppressing nature. Consider also the fuel, water and haulage required to make these inputs – let alone the plastic contamination in municipal composts.

Weeds play a crucial role here at the farm. They encourage pollination far more suited to local insects. They build fertility through diverse root systems and create easy, ▷



We converted an old dairy pasture and set out to prove that food can be grown as part of an ecosystem where every animal and insect, friend or foe, is welcome



We as humans are just as much
a part of the ecosystem, and
compassionate intervention
is just as important as
the mole or worm

Pickled Oxe
Eye Daisy
Tops
28/5/24

Facing page A selection of cornflowers, sweet peas and cosmos fill the cut-flower garden, which provides The Farmers Arms pub with a constant supply of fresh blooms.

Above left *Pisum sativum* 'Ezetas Krombek Blauwschokker' has beautiful dark-purple pods that make great mangetout, but if you leave the pods you are rewarded with delicious garden peas.

Above centre Fermentation plays a key role in preserving farm produce for the pub, including these pickled ox-eye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) tops.

Above right Joshua picks handfuls of crown daisy (*Glebionis coronaria*). This self-seeds reliably and offers amazing pollination. Known in Japanese cuisine as *shungiku*, its young leaves can be cooked but the peeled soft stems are a crunchy and refreshing treat.

▷ complex polycultures with our vegetables. Many are also delicious, such as sow thistle and nettle. We've banned the hoe and instead manage our weeds to grow in harmony with our produce, with any unruly ones sickled and used as mulch.

Like weeds, pests are an important part of our system: more slugs means more beetles. Buzzards and hawks keep the pigeons away, attracted by the mice who love our weedy habitats, and who, in turn, also eat slugs. We as farmers must try to not interrupt the processes nature creates, but it can take years to reach an equilibrium.

Much like Manasobu's teachings, agroforestry and perennials have come to define our natural farming now. Food forests, perennial vegetables and syntropic agriculture have become key themes as annual production becomes more unsustainable with our changing climate. People often ask me how the farm works, why weeds don't compete, why slugs don't eat everything – which they have in the past, but we are finding this just isn't the case as each year passes. Soon enough owls, thrushes, kingfishers, adders and newts return and the ecosystem rebuilds itself, and you find them living under your lettuces and cabbages, right there with you in the field.

Each year we find a new beetle or bee. We find ourselves free from the need of compost, cardboard, netting and fleece. The introduction of perennial vegetables will hopefully eliminate the need for polytunnels, by extending our season. One important lesson I've learned is not to separate myself from the ecosystem. We as humans are just as much a part of it, and compassionate intervention is just as important as the mole or worm.

So, instead of doing things the way they have always been done, why don't we try something different? □

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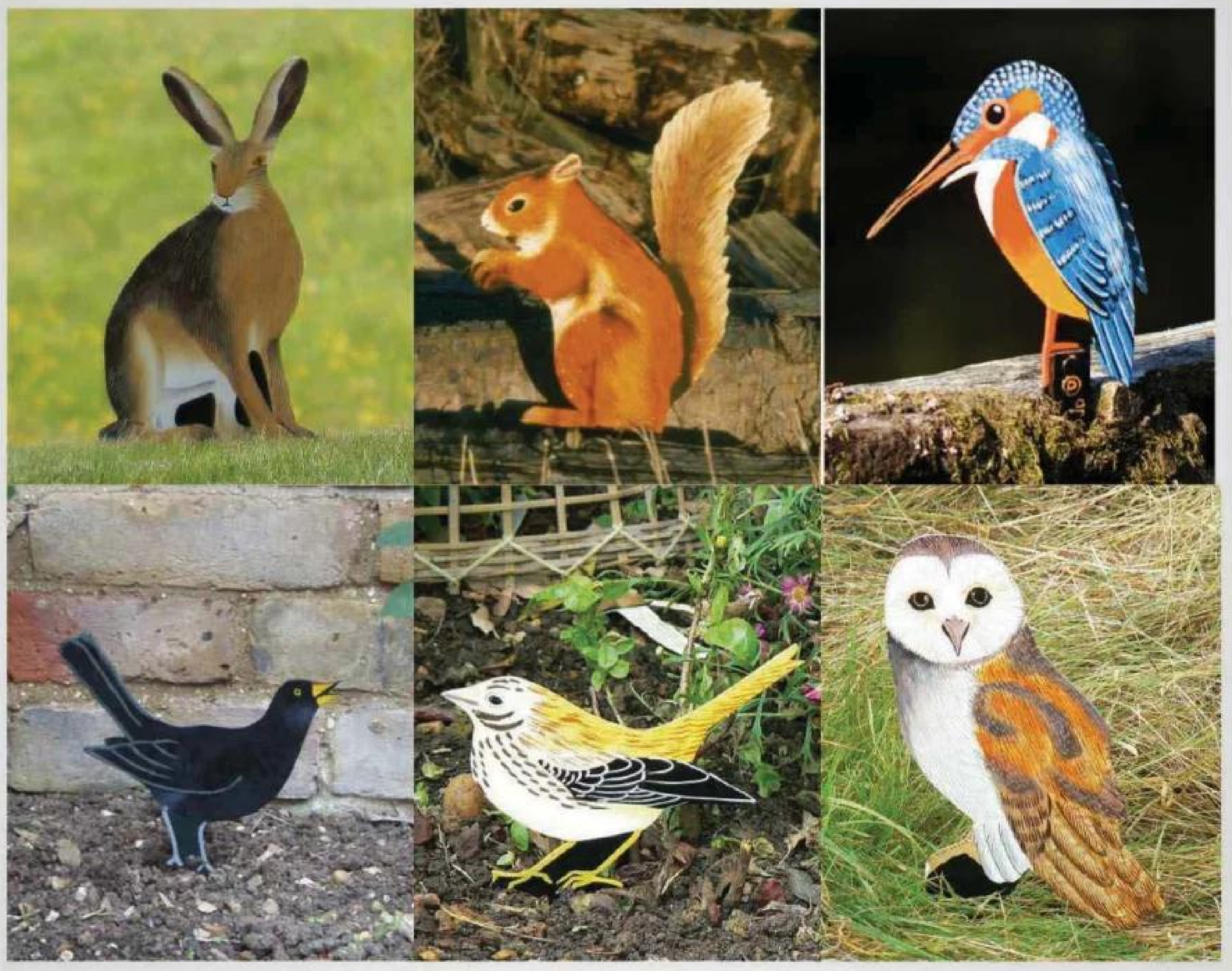

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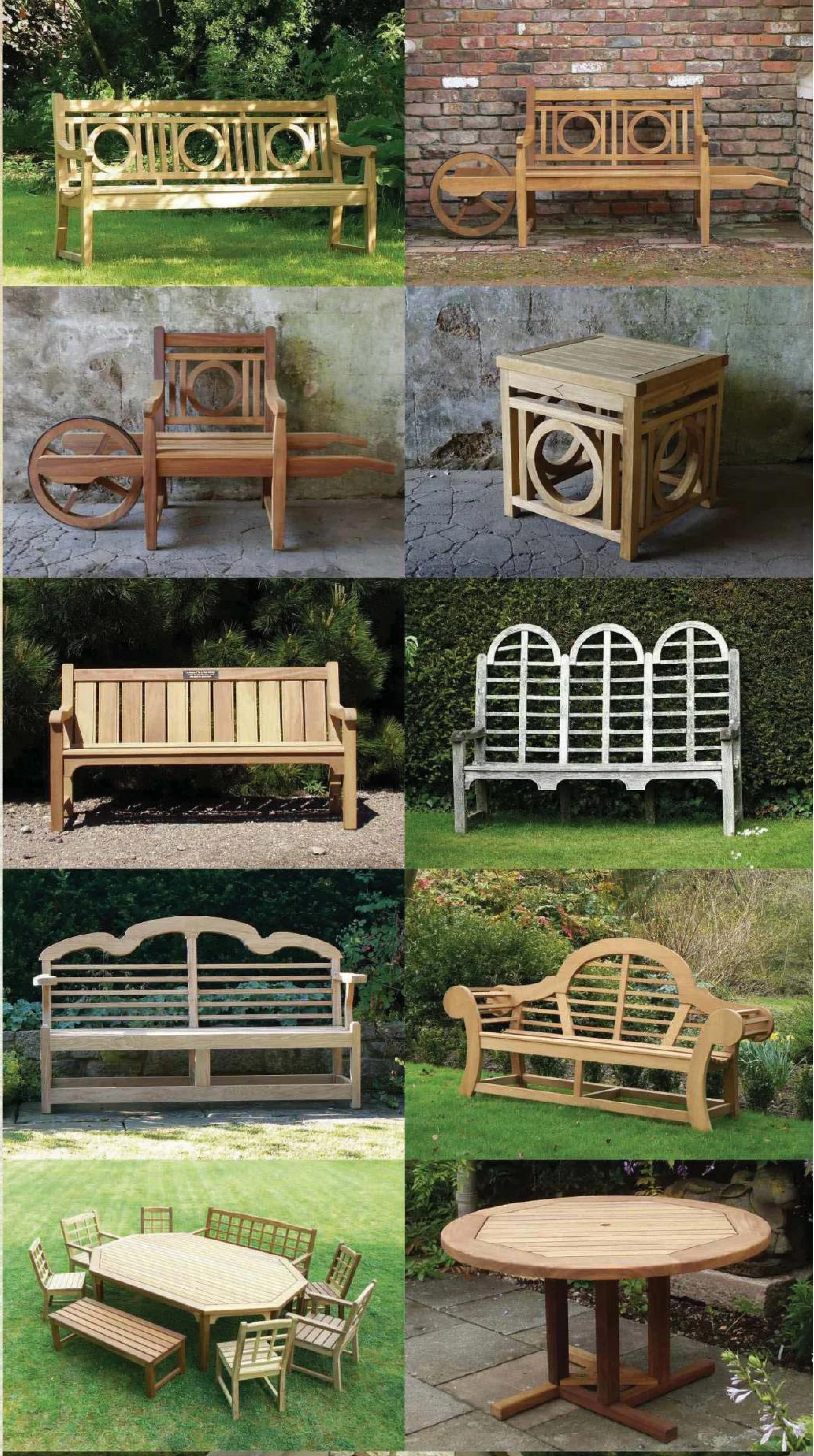

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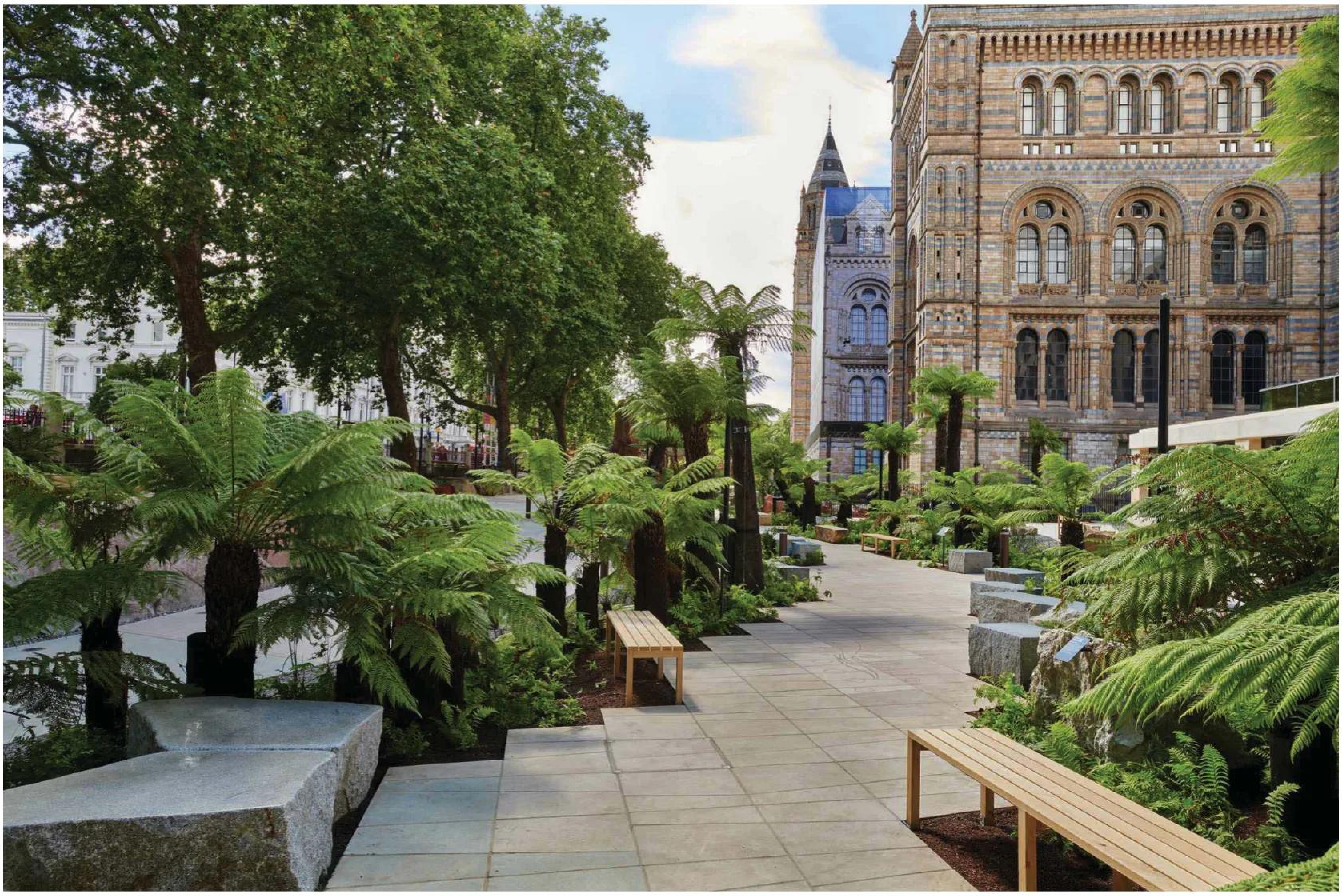
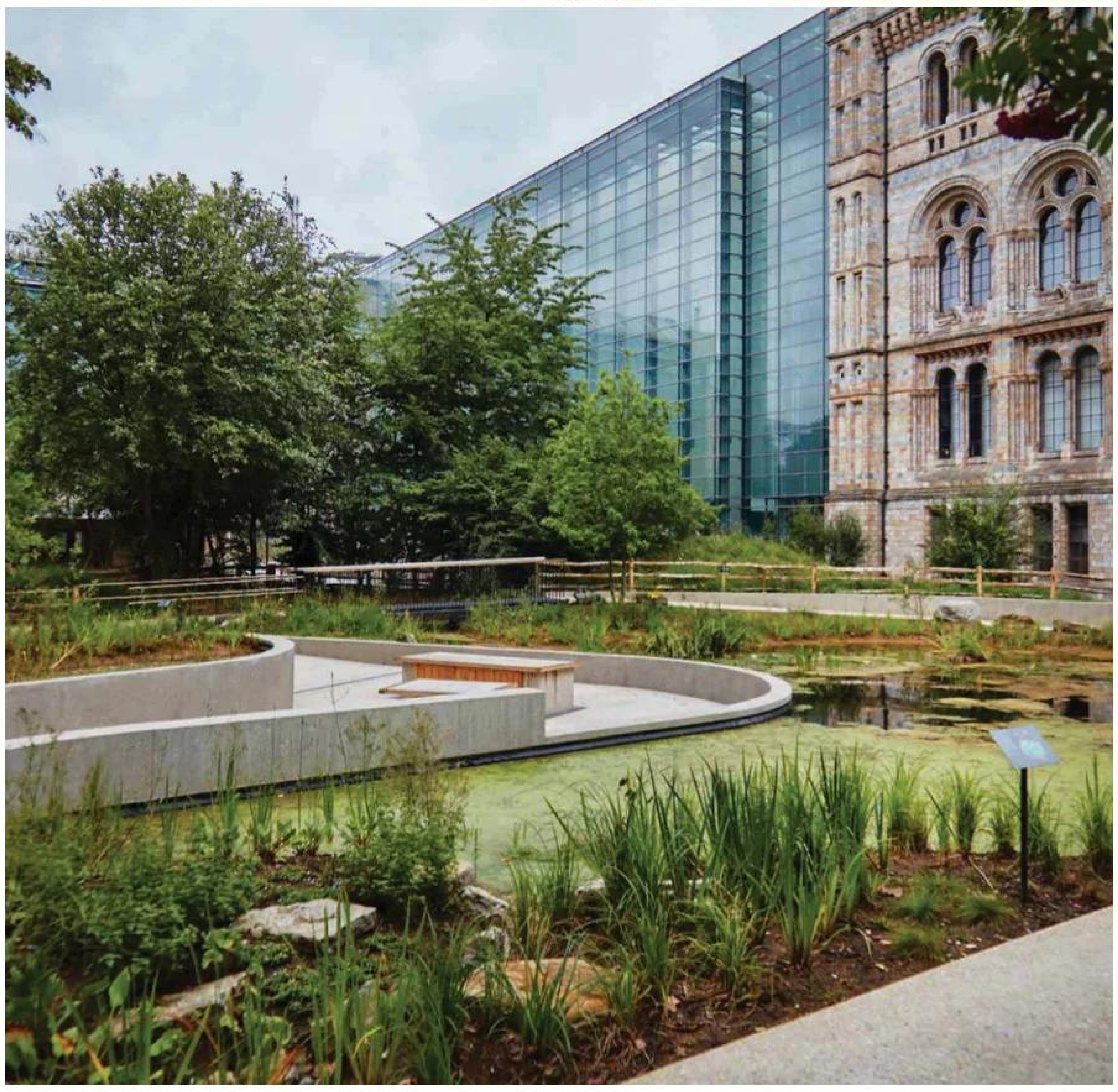
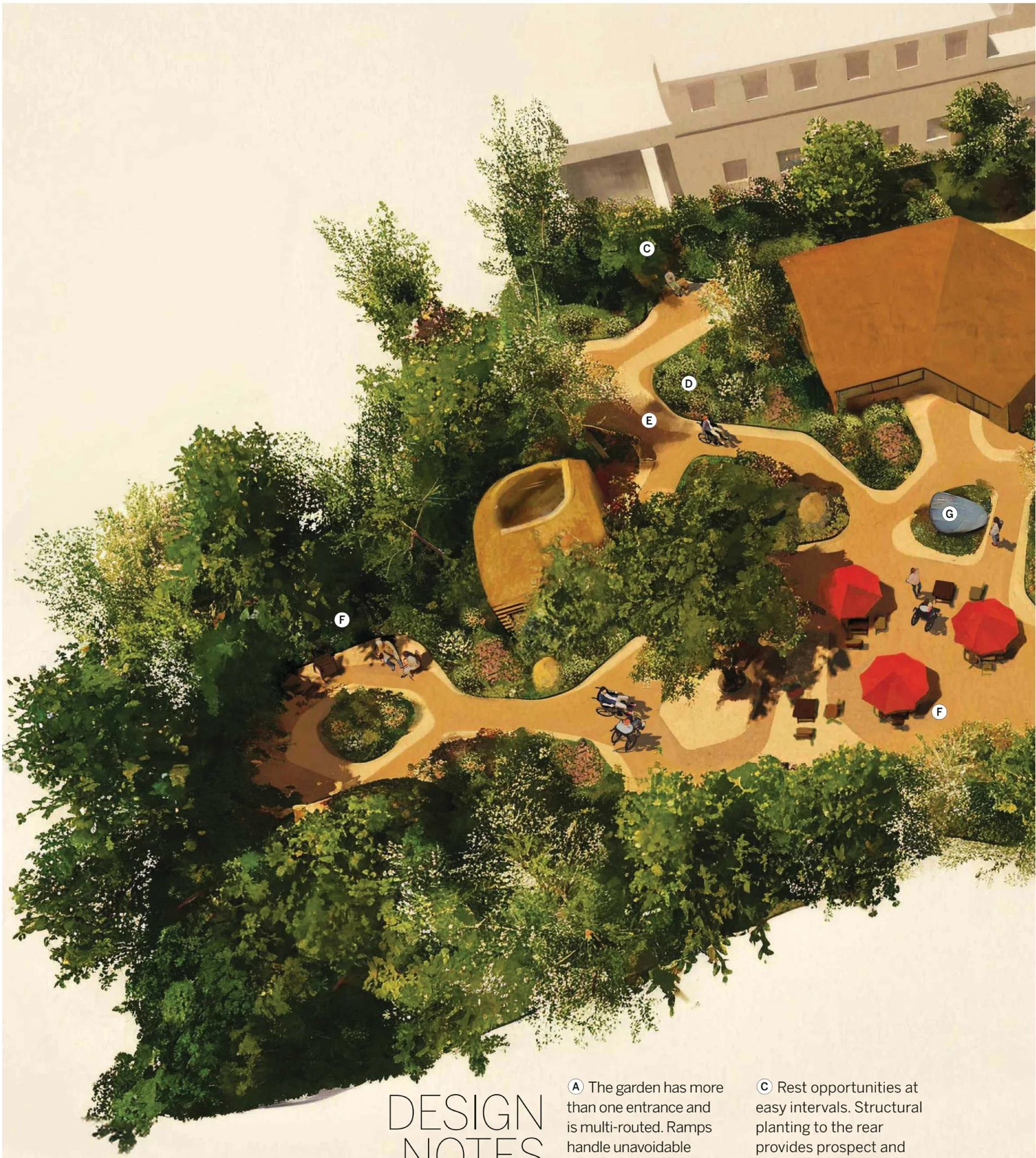


A world of discovery

Work has been completed on the Natural History Museum's major project to reimagine the five acres of gardens that wrap around the building. This diverse green space in the centre of London is now an accessible, free-to-enter garden featuring two outdoor galleries that explore the story of Earth, stretching back 2.7 billion years, as well as teaching visitors about local wildlife. In the Evolution Garden, plants have been selected so visitors can immerse themselves in planting that reflects the changing environment, from mosses and liverworts to tree ferns and flowering plants. In the Nature Discovery Garden, scientists will monitor and identify local wildlife. It will be one of the most intensively studied urban environments of its kind in the world, helping to develop best practice for nature recovery in cities. As part of the transformation of the gardens by a team including J&L Gibbons, the existing pond was relocated. The water and pond life were transferred to temporary tanks before being reintroduced to the new space where frogs, newts, dragonflies and mandarin ducks have made themselves at home. **nhm.ac.uk**



JONATHAN E. JACKSON/ NHM PHOTO UNIT, AIMEE McARDLE/ NHM LONDON, THE TRUSTEES OF THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, LONDON



DESIGN NOTES

Harris Bugg Studio's plan for Horatio's Garden Sheffield & East features many accessible elements

Ⓐ The garden has more than one entrance and is multi-routed. Ramps handle unavoidable changes in levels.

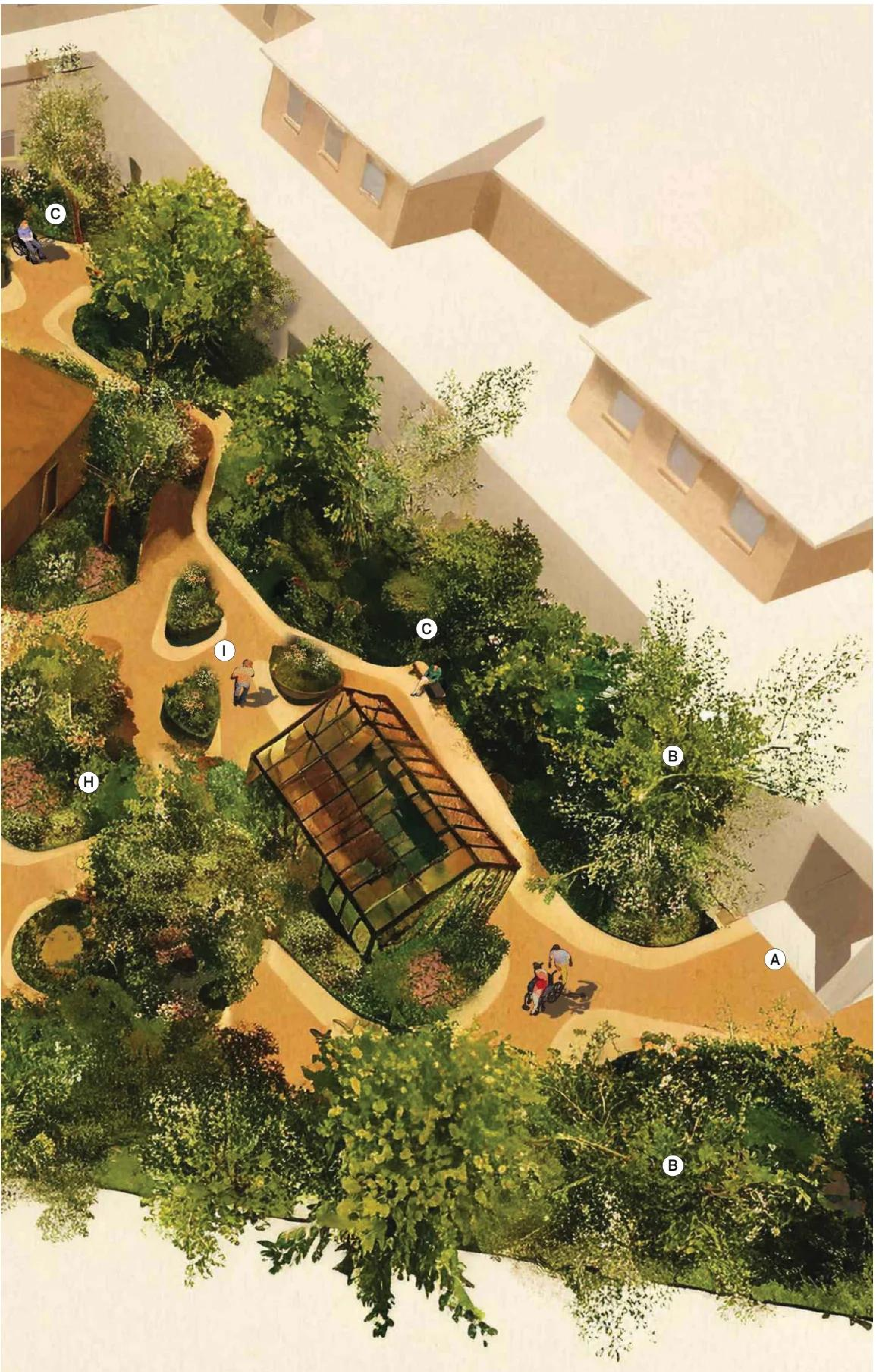
Ⓑ Trees regulate temperature and provide cooling, as well as a green canopy to view looking up from a bed in the garden or out of a window.

Ⓒ Rest opportunities at easy intervals. Structural planting to the rear provides prospect and refuge, with scented planting to the sides.

Ⓓ Planting beds with contoured 'bellies' allow for immersion at wheelchair or bed height.

INCLUSIVE DESIGN

In the first of her new garden design series, **Charlotte Harris** shares her experience in practical design, looking at the details that make a garden more accessible



Ⓔ Curvilinear pathways are simpler to navigate in a wheelchair or bed.
Ⓕ Flexible mixed and moveable seating for a range of group sizes, or for quiet time.
Ⓖ A large water table is interactive, and brings movement, sound and wildlife to the garden.
Ⓗ Multi-sensory, multi-layered and multi-season planting for patients who may be resident in the hospital for months.
Ⓘ Raised beds at wheelchair and bed height.

ILLUSTRATION HARRIS BUGG STUDIO; PORTRAIT CHRISTA HOLKA

At our design studio, connecting people and nature forms the core of our values manifesto: making gardens of all sizes and locations which can be enjoyed by everyone. At RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 2021, we brought a pocket park to the show – an exploration of what publicly shared garden spaces mean. In 2023, we continued this strand of connectivity and accessibility with our Best in Show garden for Horatio's Garden.

The garden was actually just stopping briefly at Chelsea en route to its legacy home at one of the largest NHS spinal injury centres in the country, at the Northern General Hospital in Sheffield. As you read this, the works for a garden eight times the size of the Chelsea version are well underway, replacing a car park with a healing sanctuary of green. It is due to open in spring 2025 for patients, their friends and family, and the NHS staff who care for them.

There's been much written about the power of gardens and green spaces – most recently in Sue Stuart-Smith's seminal book *The Well Gardened Mind*. You may not think accessibility is something you need right now, but this will change over time – for you or for those you love. What's more, whether in a wheelchair, using a walking frame, having a broken leg or simply getting small children around, more inclusive places are better for all of us.

In her brilliant book, *What Can a Body Do: How We Meet the Built World*, Sara Hendren challenges us to step away from ideas of 'normalcy' and instead to think about how good design can empower and reimagine. 'Ability and disability may be in part about the physical state of the body,' Hendren writes, 'but they are also produced by the relative flexibility or rigidity of the built world.' If we think differently about the details of our gardens, it has the power to make places that all of us can enjoy and be enriched by. ▷

Charlotte Harris is an award-winning garden designer, co-founder of Harris Bugg Studio with Hugo Bugg, and a *Gardens Illustrated* contributing editor.

DESIGN IDEAS FOR INCLUSIVE GARDENS

① **Close enough to touch** In Horatio's Garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2023, the layers of planting were at a suitable height to enable wheelchair users to reach out and feel them from the paths.

② **Serpentine paths** enable easier movement for patients using wheelchairs or in beds at Horatio's Garden London & South East. A tree located right in the path enables even those in hospital beds to enjoy the dappled shade and proximity to a tree. This clear-stemmed birch set into the surface allows patients in hospital beds to get close to its tactile bark.

③ **Surrounded by green** In Tom Stuart-Smith's design for Horatio's Garden London & South East, the planting is immersive, and paths are wide enough to position a bed wherever the patient prefers to be in the garden.

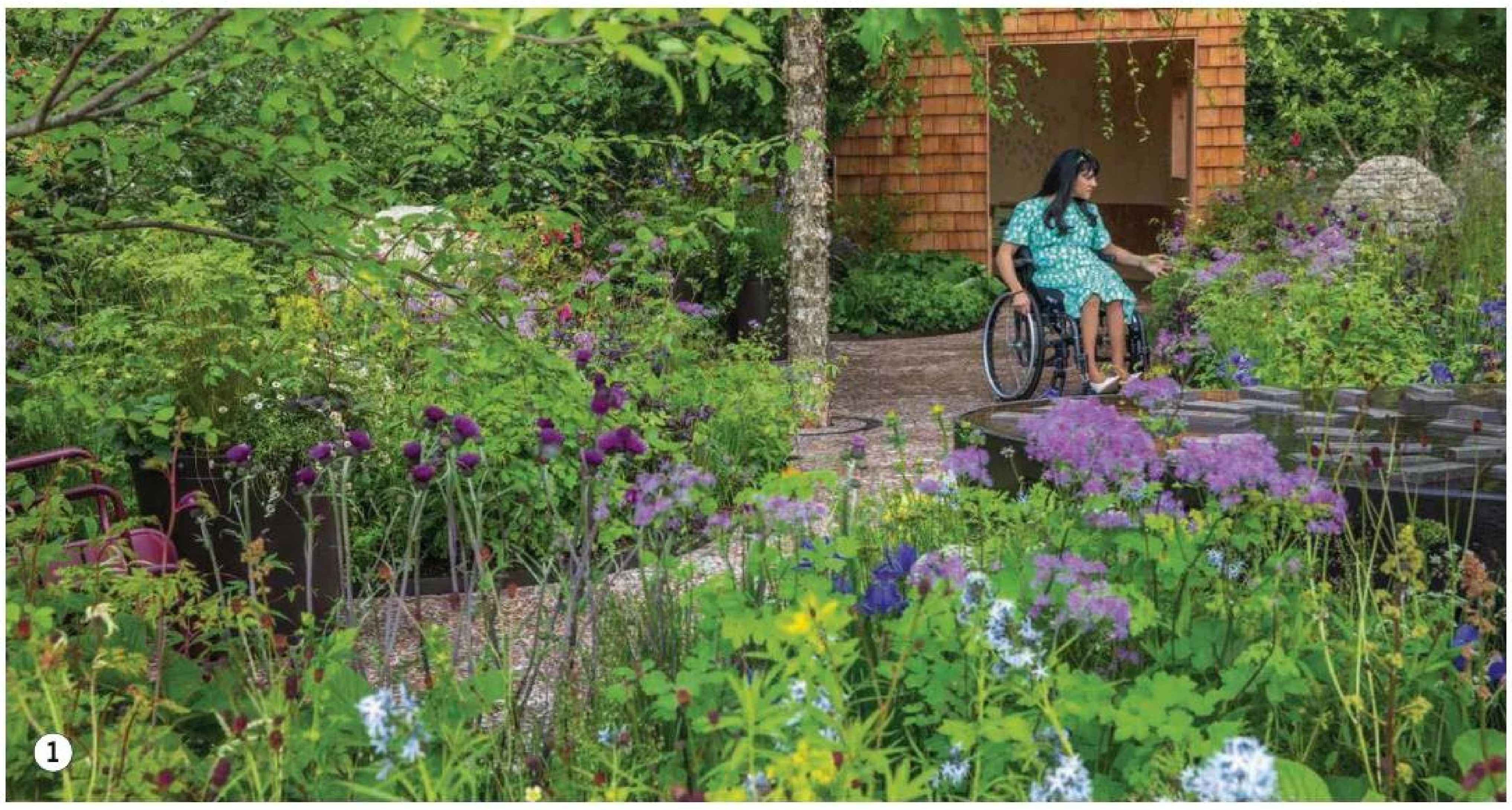
④ **Water features**, such as the water table from the Horatio's Garden Chelsea introduce gently moving and interactive water for people and wildlife. Seating such as this chair can be positioned at easy distances, to offer regular rest and contemplation spots. A mix of fixed and lightweight moveable seating enables flexibility of position and capacity.

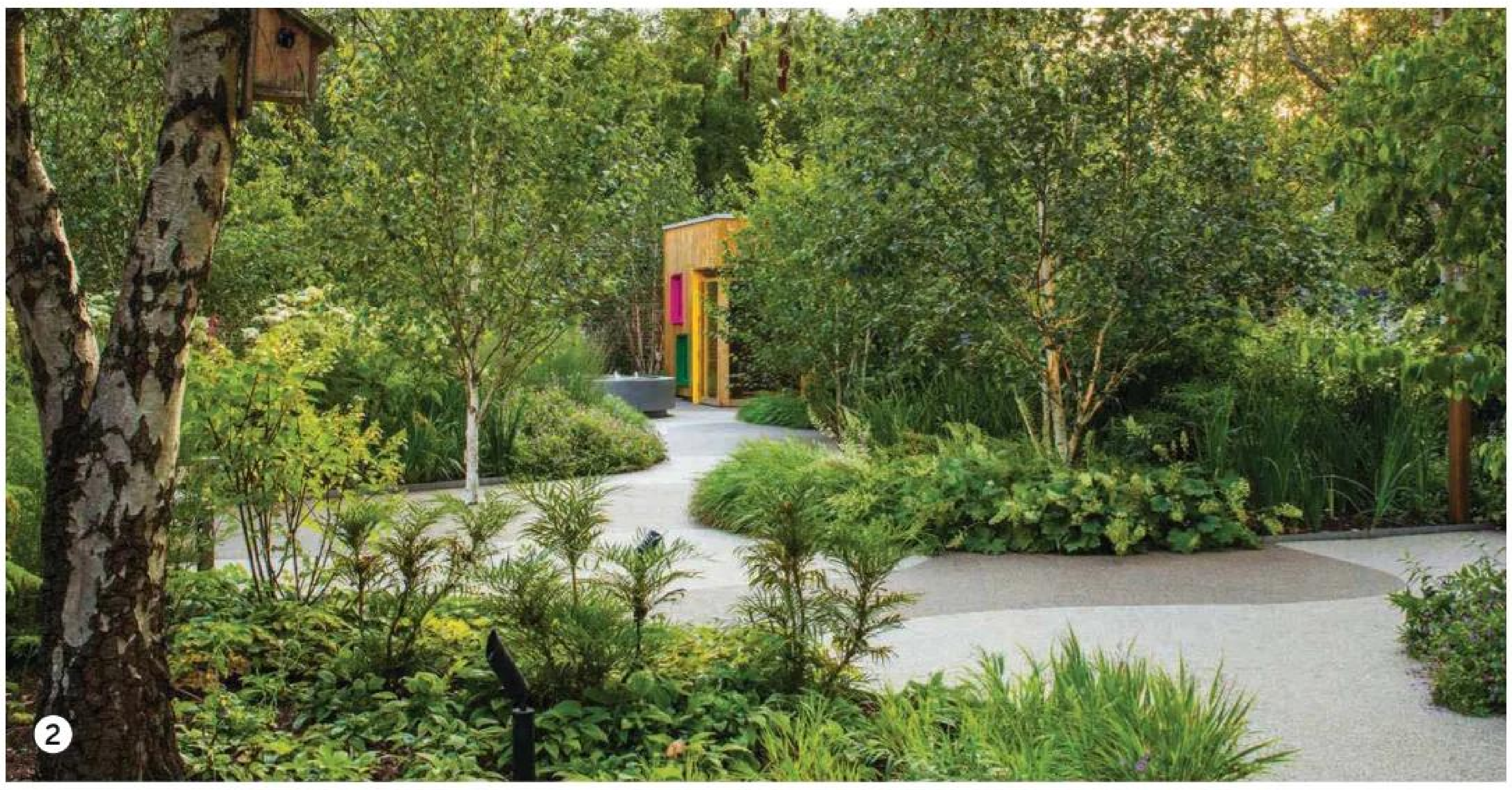
⑤ **Waymarking features** help legibility in a garden, and therefore a person's sense of safety, comfort and enjoyment. At Horatio's Garden Sheffield & East, we are including more of these dry-stone 'cairns' first used in the RHS Chelsea Flower Show garden for the charity.

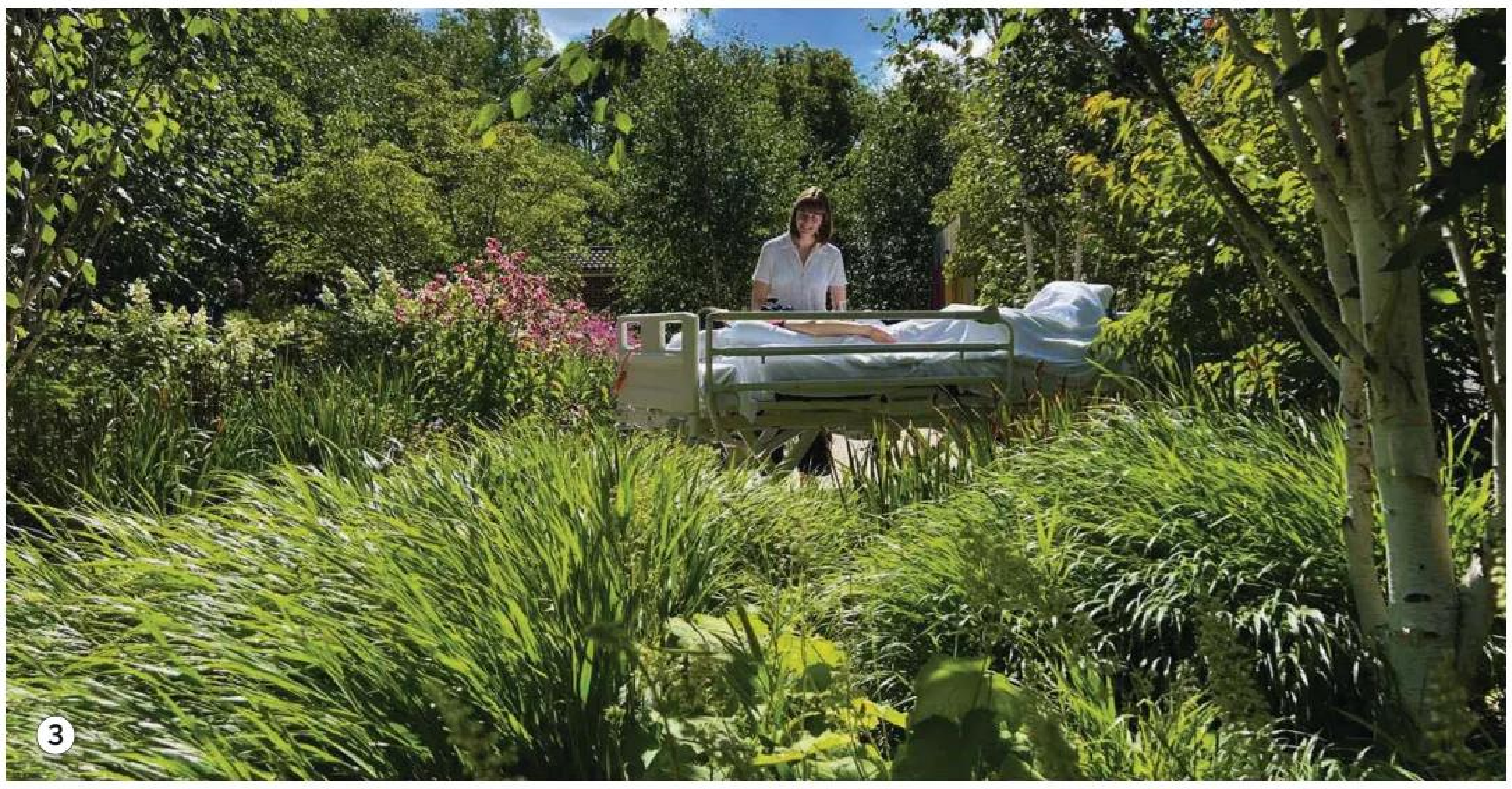
⑥ **A raised edge** of 50mm makes pathways easier to see and read, and helps those getting newly accustomed to wheelchairs. In this instance it is metal, but it could just as easily be a timber edging or kerb pieces.

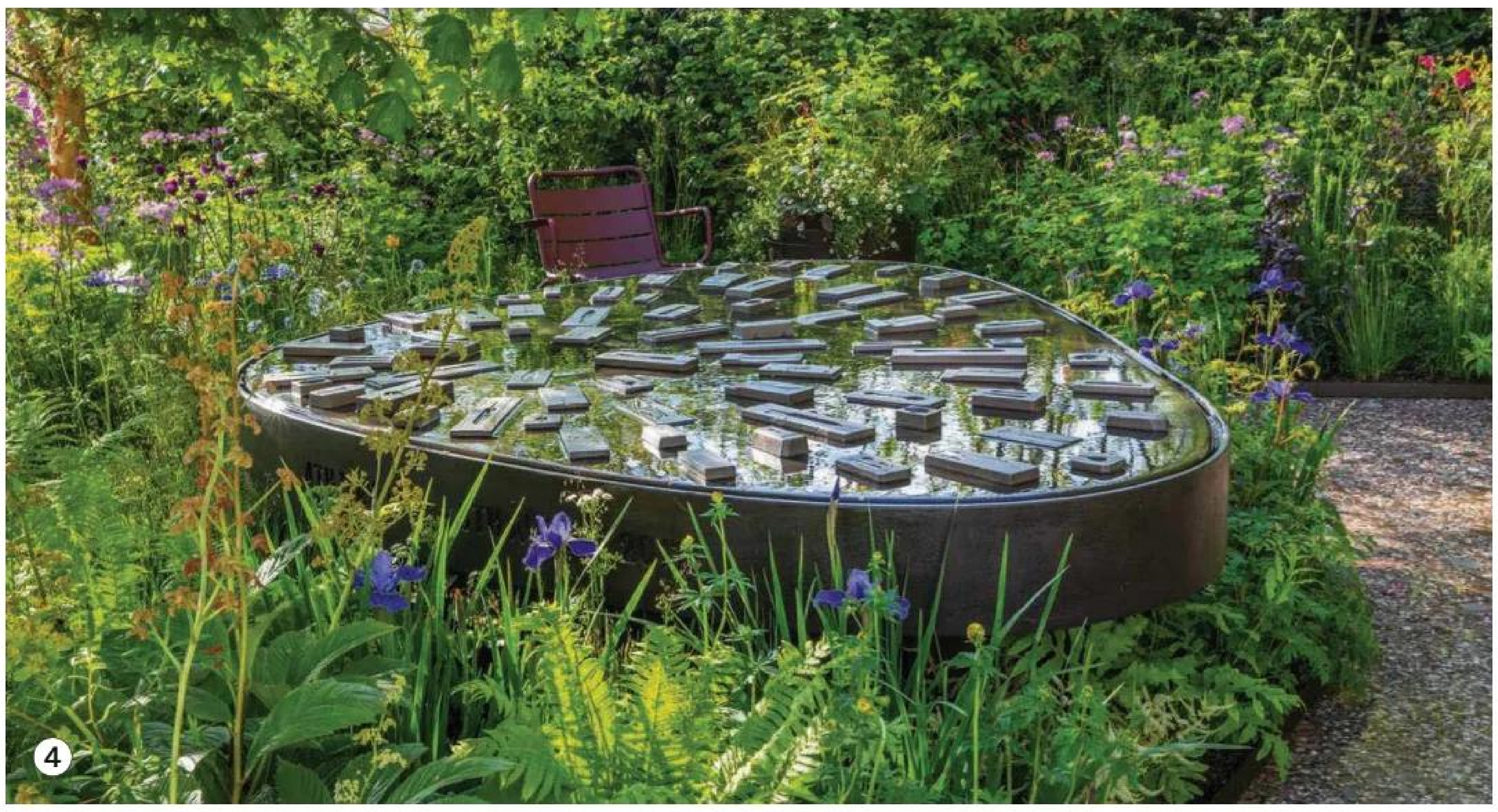
⑦ **Colour guides** Charlie Hawkes's 2023 RHS Chelsea show garden for The National Brain Appeal effectively demonstrated how delineating areas of the garden by colour can help people with a rare form of dementia to locate themselves within the space.

⑧ **Cooling effect** Trees offer therapeutic benefits in regulating body temperature and sun exposure and are important to include in design. Trees can also reduce the scale of buildings to help patients transition more easily to the natural environment of the garden, and even provide a canopy 'garden' for them to look down on from upper-floor wards.









1,2&4 MARIANNE MAJERUS. COURTESY OF HORATIO'S GARDEN. 3 HORATIO'S GARDEN LONDON

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5&6 MARIANNE MAJERUS, COURTESY OF HORATIO'S GARDEN, 7 RHS / SARAH CUTTLE, 8 EVA NEMETH

Whether it's a garden for yourself, a place where you're helping a friend, or a green space for an organisation, you will need to do lots of listening and asking questions

▷ When Horatio's Garden asked our design studio to create an accessible garden at Northern General Hospital's spinal injury centre, they challenged us to see the requirements of patients with spinal injuries in beds or wheelchairs as a design opportunity, not a limitation.

Those using the garden will always be the best people to steer how it should work for them. Whether it's a garden for yourself, a place where you're helping a friend, or a green space for an organisation, you will need to do lots of listening and asking questions. Our ongoing learning journey with Horatio's Garden, since 2021, has included hundreds of patients, their loved ones, NHS staff, head gardeners and volunteers who have shared what makes a garden work best for them, and that in turn has directly driven the design and its details.

Paths and wayfinding

Patients told us that paths are easiest to navigate in wheelchairs or beds when they are serpentine with no sharp angles or corners. At Horatio's Garden Sheffield & East, the curvilinear paths are minimum of 1.5m wide to allow for a wheelchair with one person walking alongside, and these ebb and flow into wider spaces to allow for passing. In a domestic garden, paths should be at least 1.2m wide, with a turning circle of 2.4m.

These winding, explorative paths contrast with the requirements for gardeners with visual impairments, where a simpler geometric grid may be more suitable – underscoring the importance of really understanding who is using the garden.

By comparison, people with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia can find a garden clearer to discern and safer to be in when there are visible boundaries, markers and paths that are very simple loops or figures of eight. 'Waymarkers' or features in the garden, such as structures, seating or sculpture, help legibility, and thus increase the sense of safety, comfort and enjoyment. Sensory landmarks around the garden are also useful devices for people with visual impairments, such as the sound of water or the change in textures from a paving finish to the crunch of gravel.

Considering surfaces

Accessible gardens should also have stable, safe, glare-free surfaces. In Horatio's Gardens, these are joint-free and thus pain-free, with little or no gradient for those learning to use a wheelchair. A resin-bound gravel creates a smooth, permeable and durable surface that doesn't shift as standard gravel does. Where a poured surface can't be used, larger paving units with a good grip rating can be an option, with meticulous attention to laying, with flush joints to avoid trips and with joint widths no wider than 5mm. ▷

CASE STUDY

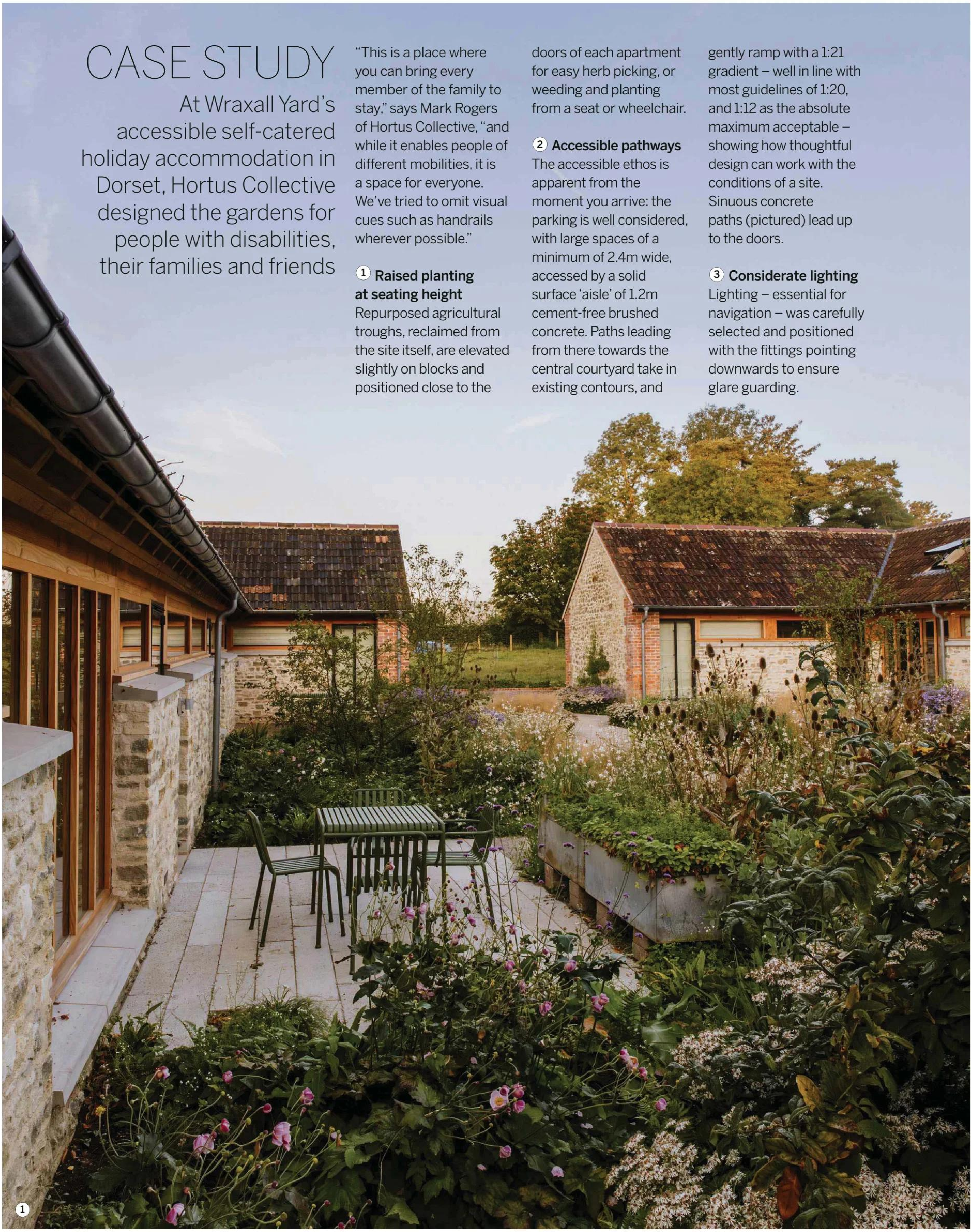
At Wraxall Yard's accessible self-catered holiday accommodation in Dorset, Hortus Collective designed the gardens for people with disabilities, their families and friends

"This is a place where you can bring every member of the family to stay," says Mark Rogers of Hortus Collective, "and while it enables people of different mobilities, it is a space for everyone. We've tried to omit visual cues such as handrails wherever possible."

① Raised planting at seating height
Repurposed agricultural troughs, reclaimed from the site itself, are elevated slightly on blocks and positioned close to the doors of each apartment for easy herb picking, or weeding and planting from a seat or wheelchair.

② Accessible pathways
The accessible ethos is apparent from the moment you arrive: the parking is well considered, with large spaces of a minimum of 2.4m wide, accessed by a solid surface 'aisle' of 1.2m cement-free brushed concrete. Paths leading from there towards the central courtyard take in existing contours, and gently ramp with a 1:21 gradient – well in line with most guidelines of 1:20, and 1:12 as the absolute maximum acceptable – showing how thoughtful design can work with the conditions of a site. Sinuous concrete paths (pictured) lead up to the doors.

③ Considerate lighting
Lighting – essential for navigation – was carefully selected and positioned with the fittings pointing downwards to ensure glare guarding.



2

Well-crafted views and experiences of planting throughout the garden are critical; they invite us to come into the garden on a difficult day, or to act as rehabilitation goals

▷ Gravel is a low-cost alternative but can be hard for wheels to move on. Alternatively, consider using hoggin or self-binding gravel, which are more stable due to the higher content of finer particles. In time, however, they can rut and may need improving on a semi-regular basis. Making pathway edges more legible – for wheelchair users or people with visual impairment, for example – is worth consideration.

Spaces to rest

As in every garden, creating a balance of places for shared and more private moments to linger is key. In an adaptive garden, consider how seating can be positioned at easy distances, to give regular rest and contemplation spots. Seating places feel most comfortable and give that instinctive sense of safety when we have a good prospect and can see what's around. At the same time, they need to create a sense of refuge, with something solid behind. At Horatio's Garden Sheffield & East, we are planting shrubs and trees behind seating spaces, with lower, scented, tactile species at the sides as an immersive embrace.

Shade is critical. Bodily temperature regulation issues are experienced by many people, not just those with spinal injuries, and people with dementia can be at a higher risk from sun exposure. At the first Horatio's Garden in Salisbury, designed by Cleve West, an apple tree archway of successional English varieties creates a beautifully cool, green tunnel, perfect for sheltering from the sun. The design also allows for easy picking of apples from a wheelchair or hospital bed.

Water features should be easy to get close to and touch, and, similarly, raised containers provide alternative planting options and allow everyone to get up close.

Planting for people

Our design for the Sheffield site includes a high proportion of trees, which deliver cooling and dappled light. They reduce the scale of the hospital buildings on two sides, in an effort to help patients shift from the sterile-feeling environment of the ward indoors to the natural and transportative atmosphere of the garden. Moreover, trees deliver visible planting for many different ways of seeing, including looking at the canopy above from a hospital bed.

Layered, multi-sensory planting will help create and satisfy different viewpoints and interactions. Well-crafted views and experiences of planting throughout the garden are critical; they invite us to come into the garden on a difficult day, or even to act as goals during rehabilitation. A gentle convex topsoil 'belly' is a simple and effective trick to make planting feel more immersive and dynamic. □

3

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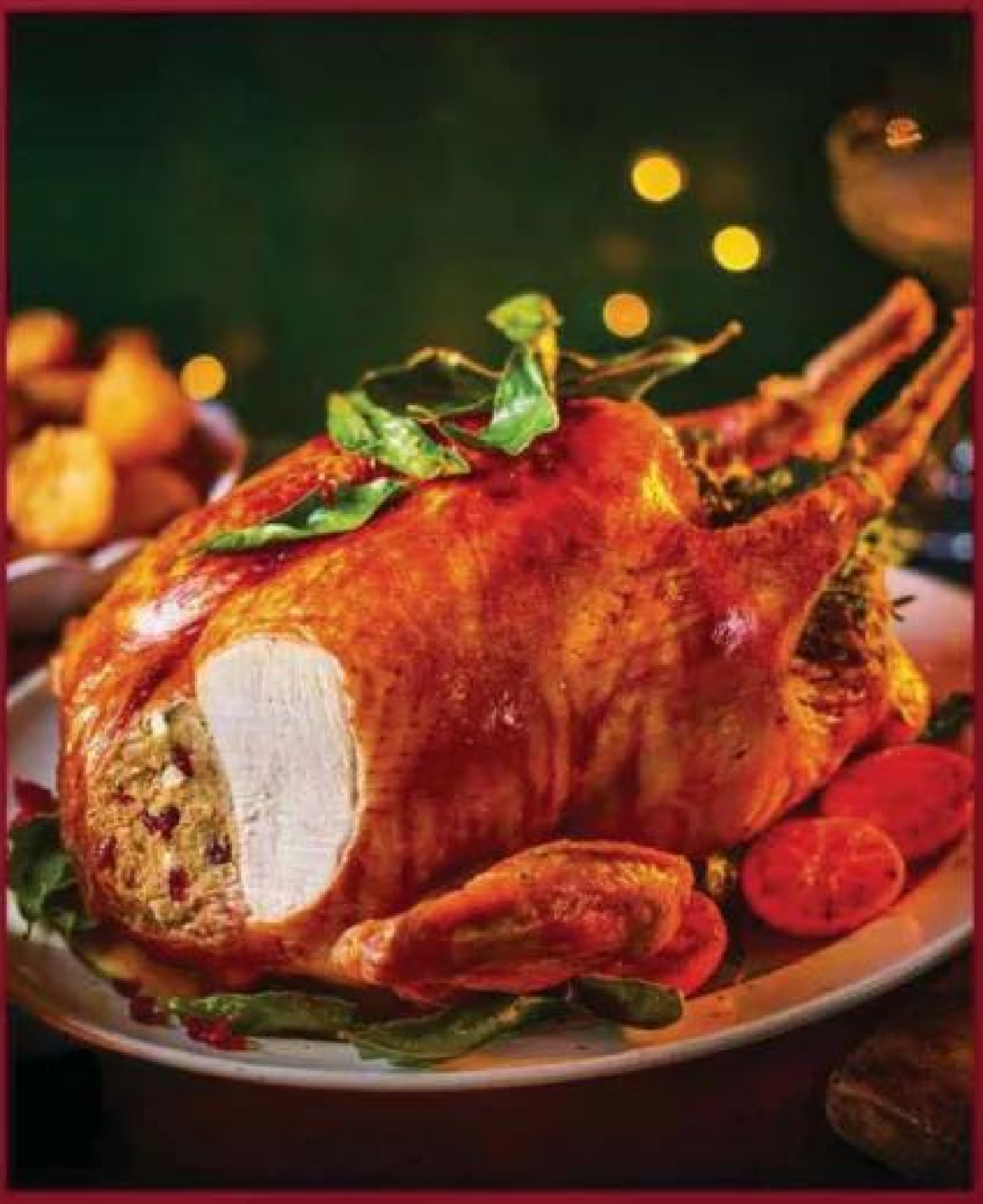

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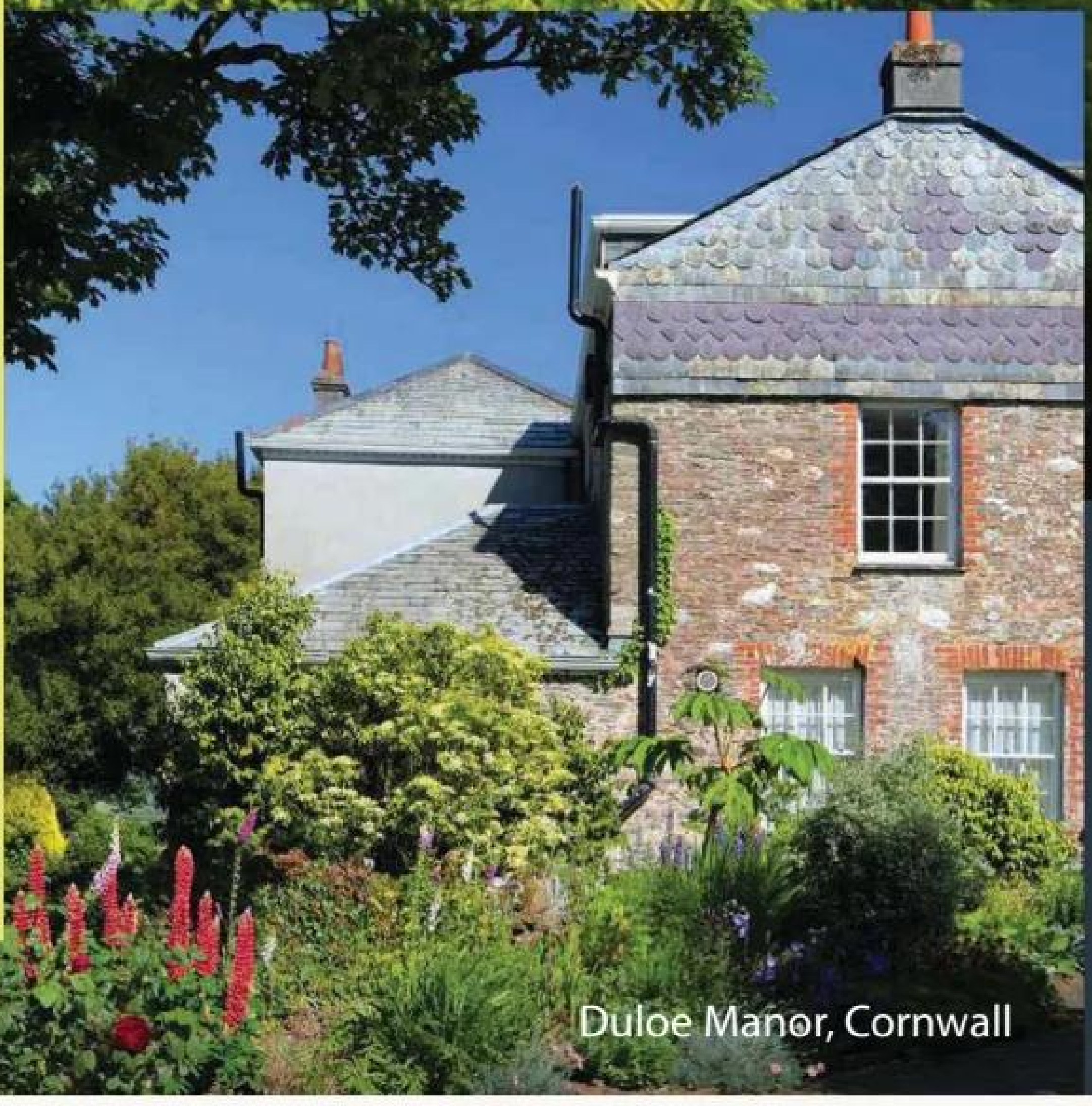

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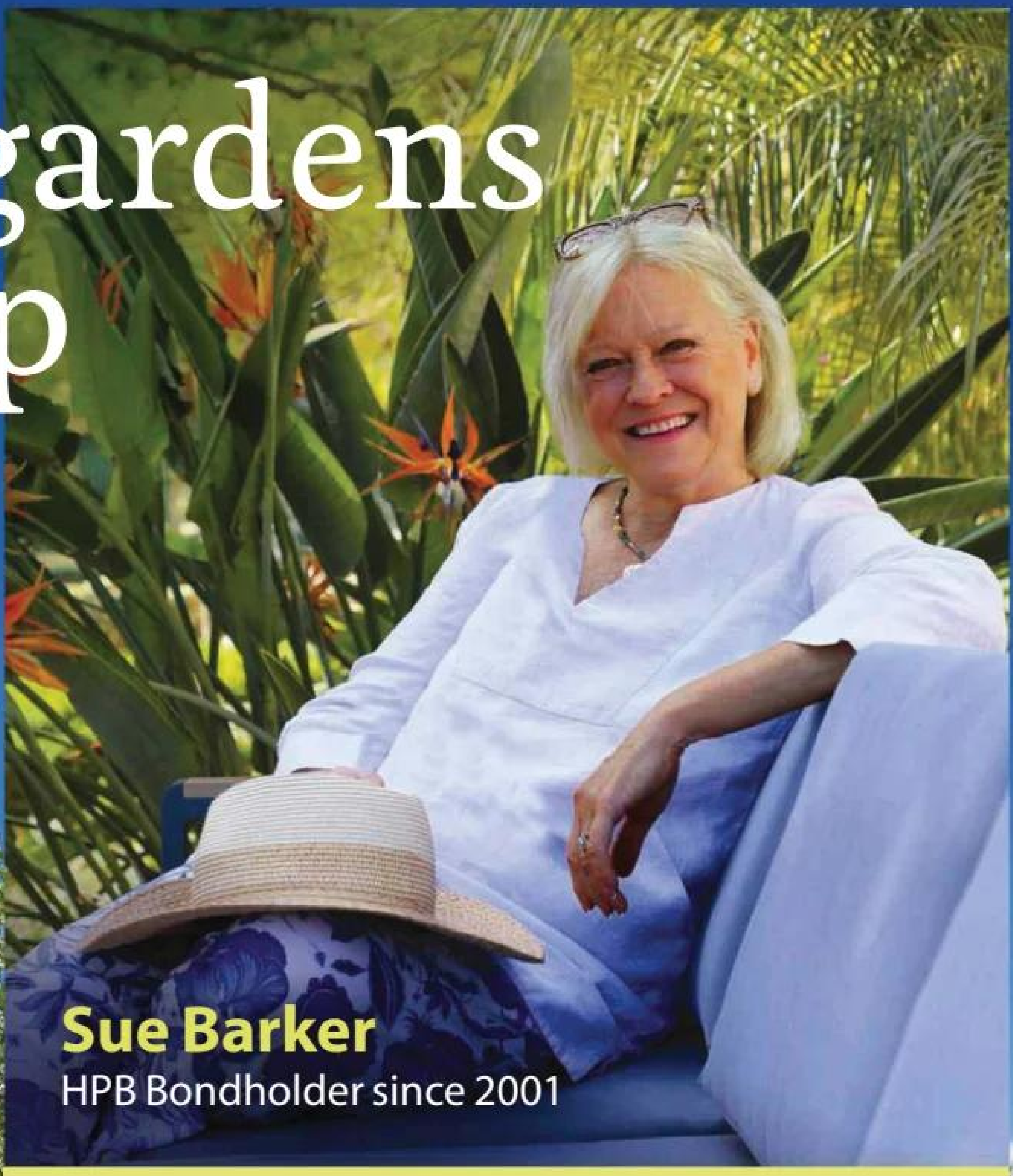

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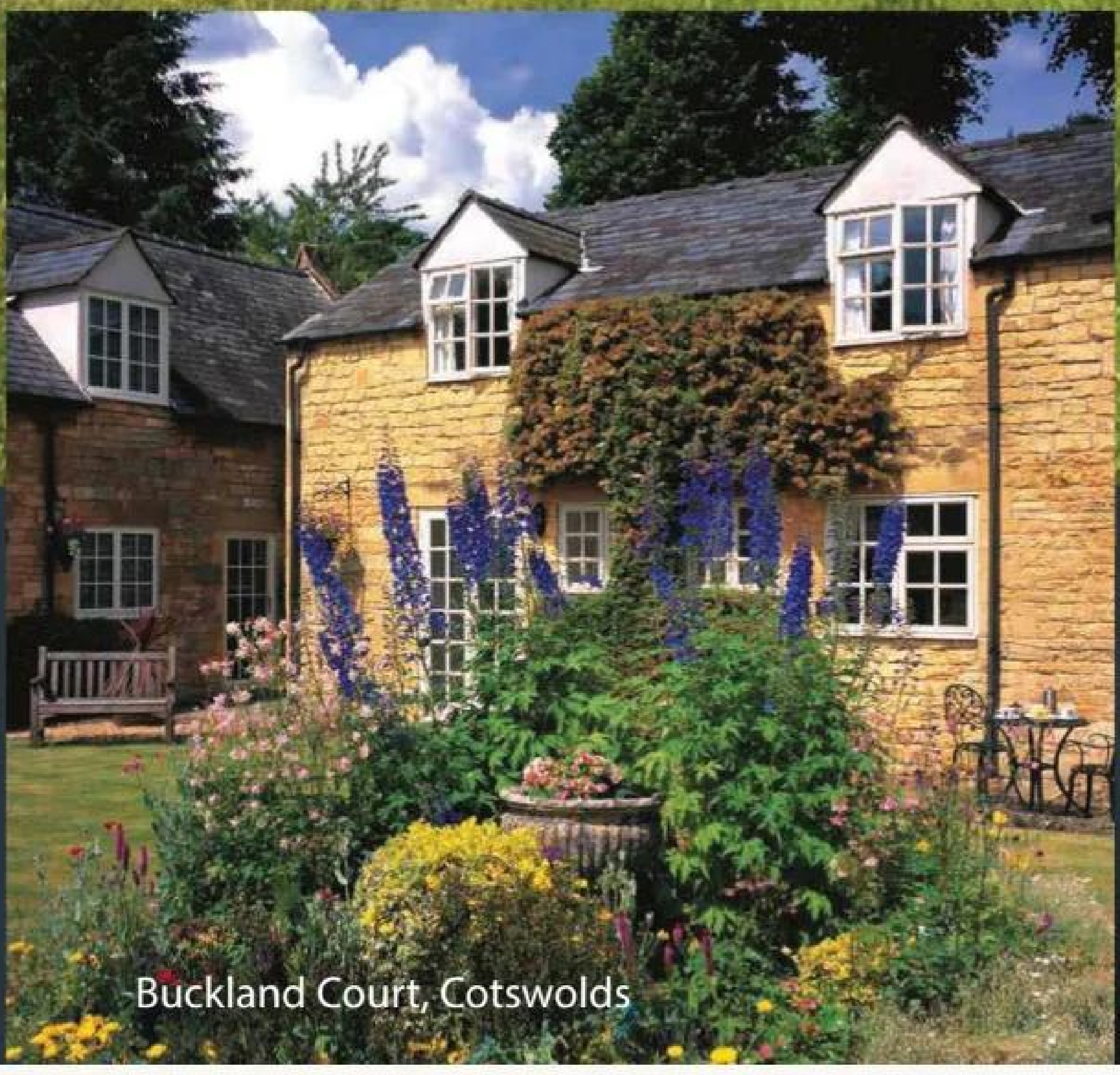

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Steve digs deep with **Turmeric+**

Landscape gardener and former triathlete, Steve Chalk, 60, from Weymouth, turned to Turmeric+ when he began to experience discomfort in his inner right knee.

'It **certainly worked** for me.'

'The discomfort was especially noticeable at night when I was turning over from my left to right side.' Steve remembers.

'It was starting to wear me down and prevent me from running, which I love to do.

'I was looking for something to help me and I read about the Turmeric+ capsules.

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I love my sport and am back to competing in park runs on a regular basis – it certainly worked for me.'

Turmeric contains compounds called curcuminoids, the most notable of which is curcumin.

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They also added vitamin C, which contributes to normal collagen formation for the normal function of cartilage and vitamin D, which contributes to the maintenance of normal bones and maintenance of normal muscle function.

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FutureYou Cambridge is offering you the opportunity to try its bestselling joint supplement, Turmeric+, for free, for 28 days.*

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'We want to support more people to become or stay active. We think Turmeric+ can play an important role in that journey.' says Adam Cleevely, FutureYou Cambridge's Chair.

'We offer people their first pack of Turmeric+ for free so they can experience Turmeric+ for themselves. Most will know if it's working for them within four to eight weeks – and if they like it, they will stick with it.'

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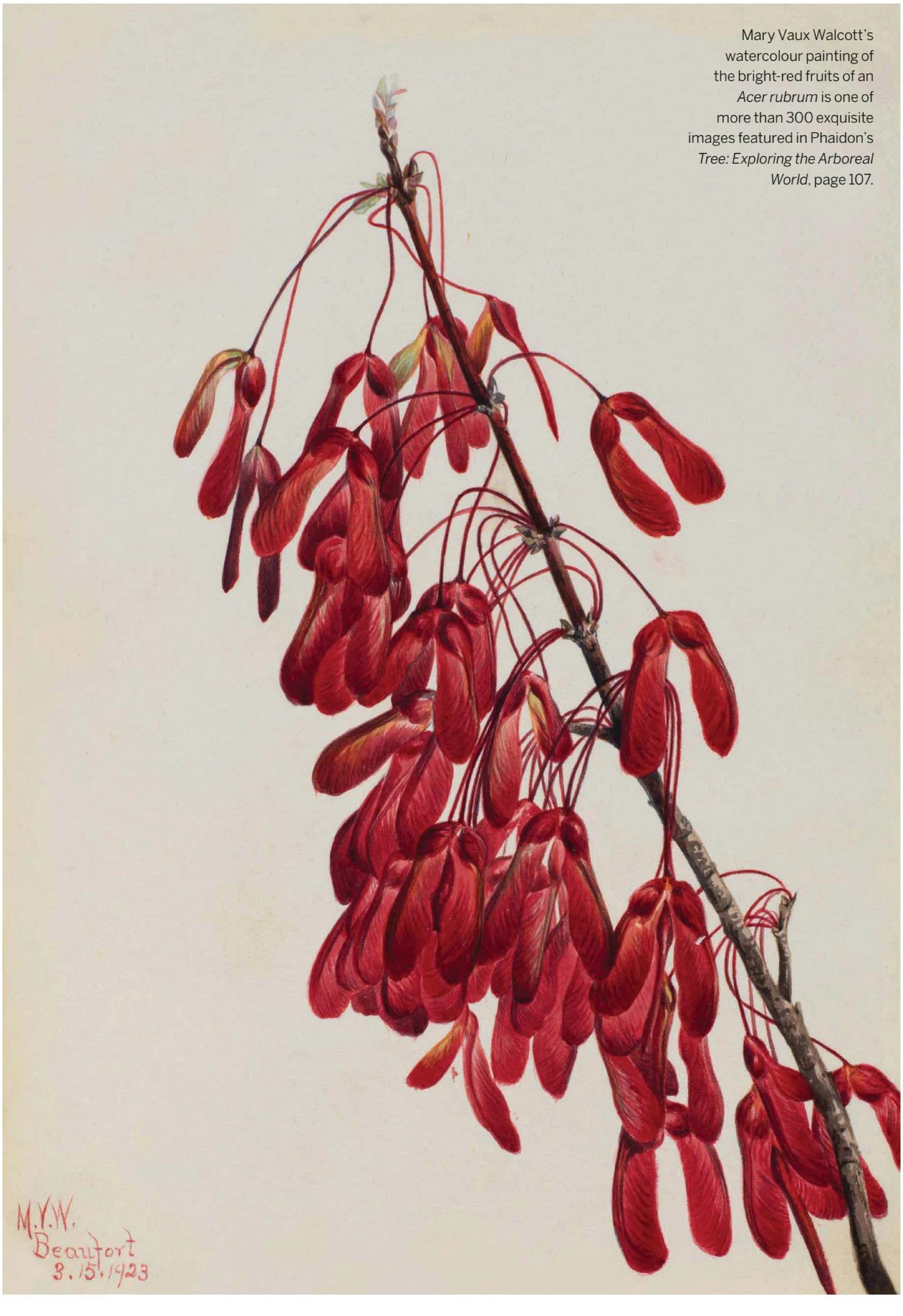
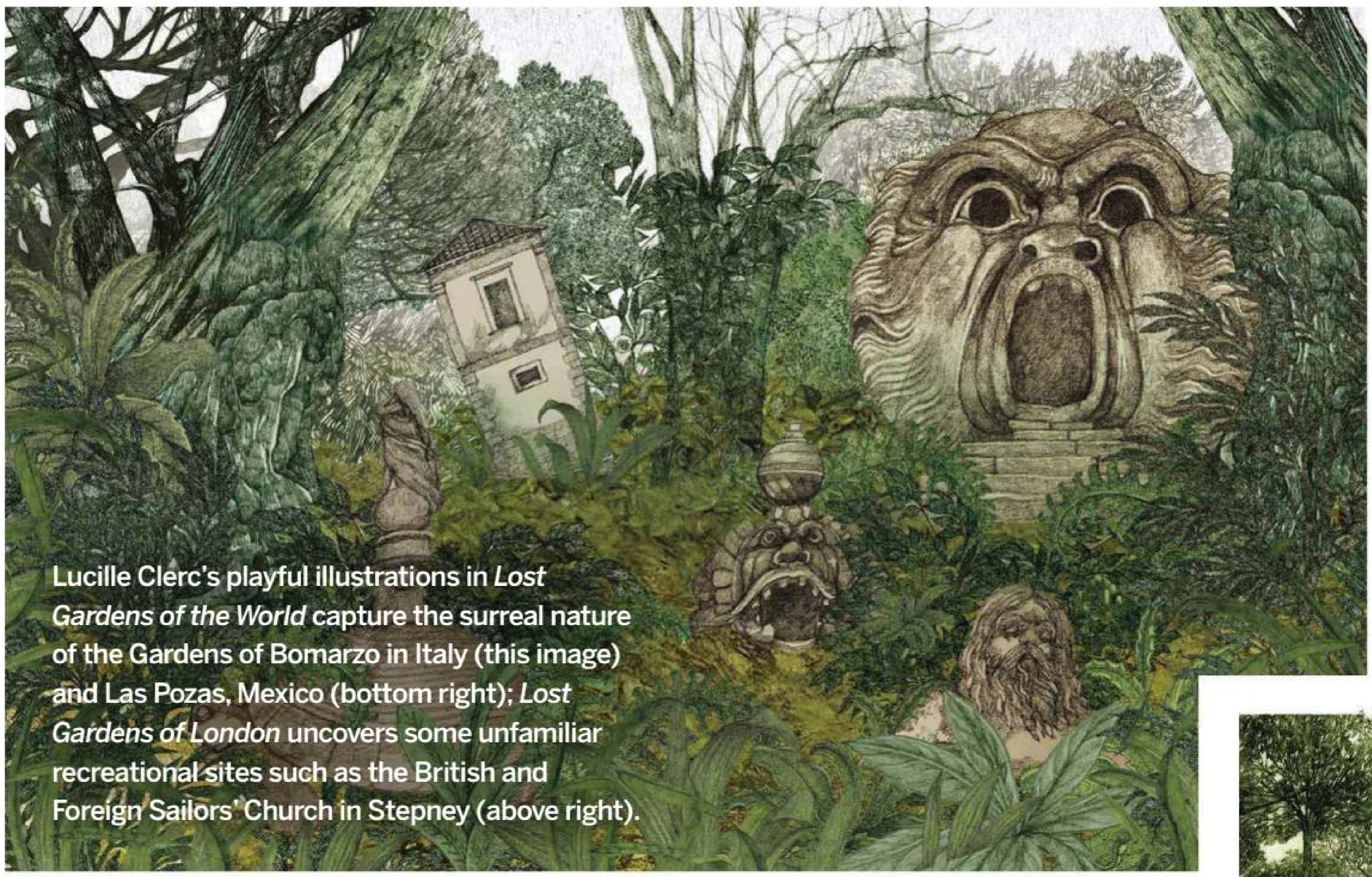
DOWNTOOLS

Book reviews, Q&A, the crossword and the big idea

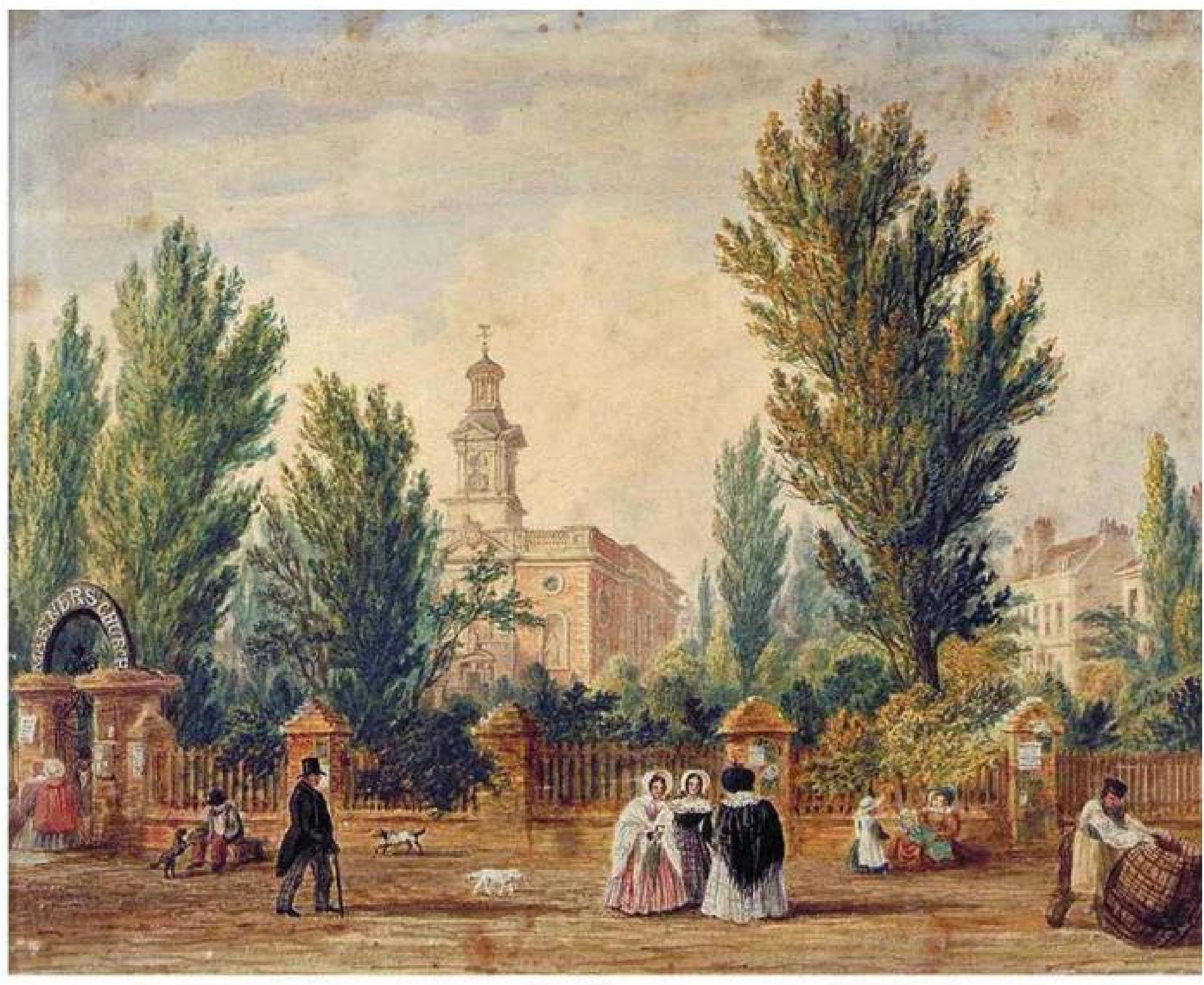


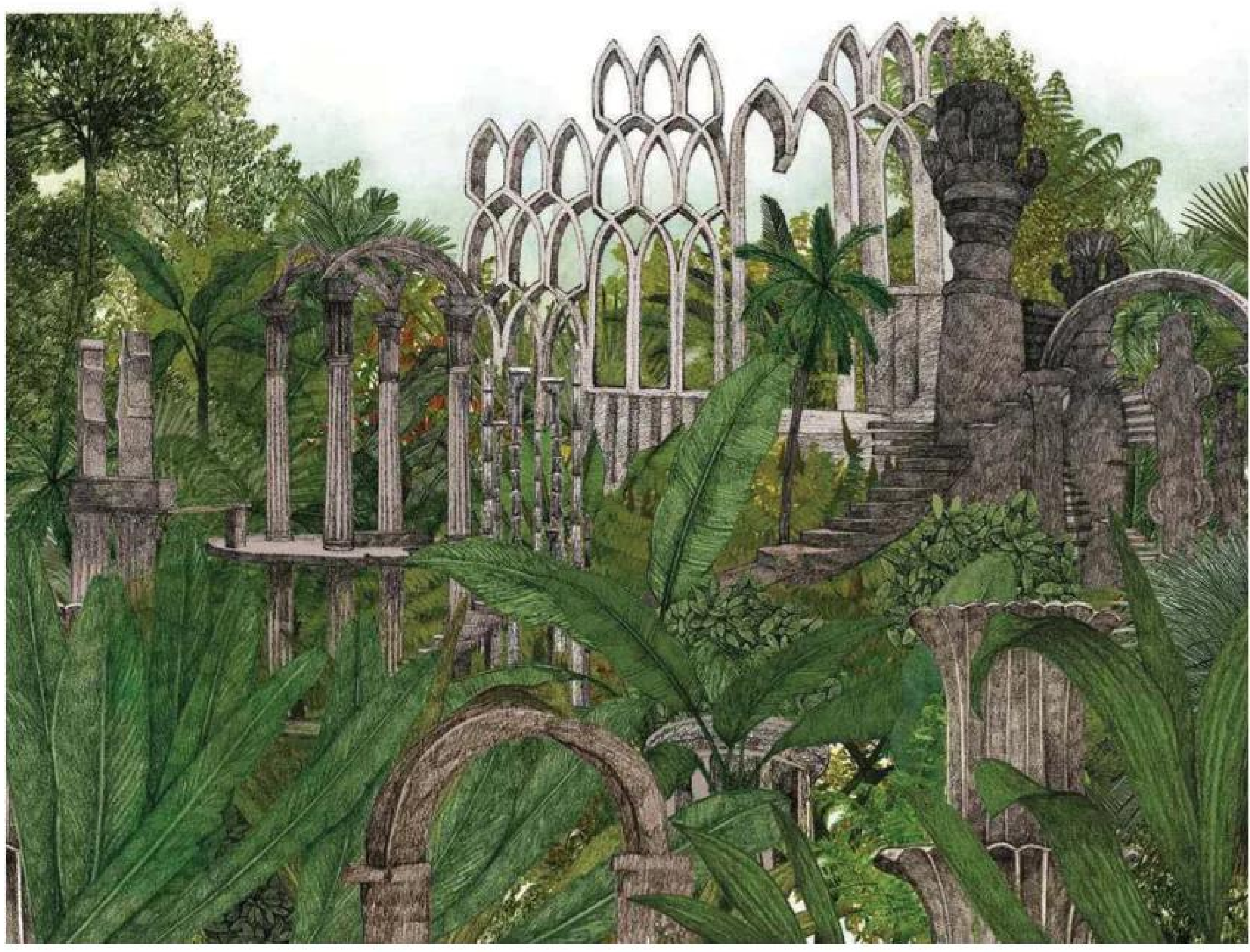
Mary Vaux Walcott's watercolour painting of the bright-red fruits of an *Acer rubrum* is one of more than 300 exquisite images featured in Phaidon's *Tree: Exploring the Arboreal World*, page 107.

MARY VAUX WALCOTT, *CAROLINA MAPLE (ACER CAROLINIANUM)*, 1923. SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM, WASHINGTON DC/GIFT OF MARY VAUX WALCOTT. WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER, 25.5 × 17.8 CM / 10 × 7 IN.



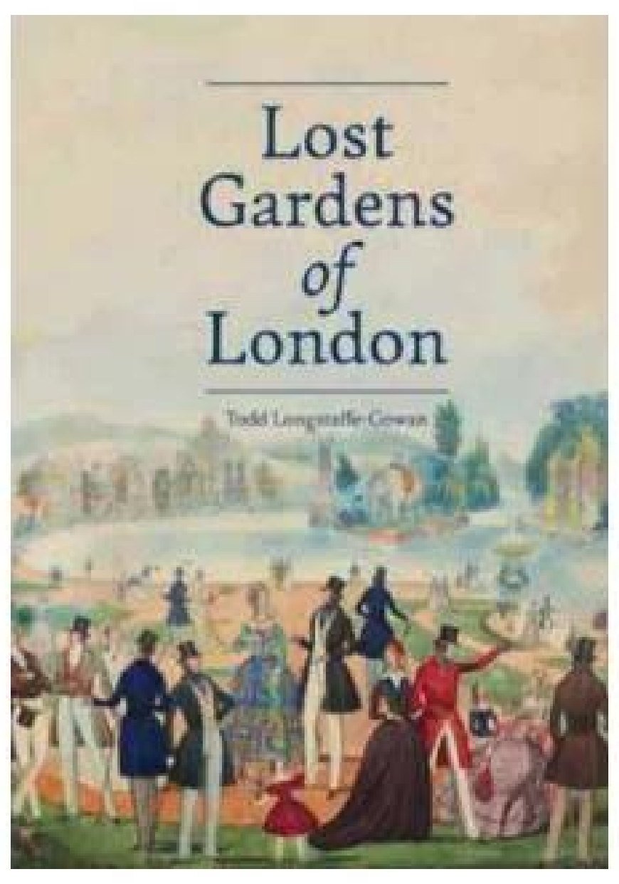
Lucille Clerc's playful illustrations in *Lost Gardens of the World* capture the surreal nature of the Gardens of Bomarzo in Italy (this image) and Las Pozas, Mexico (bottom right); *Lost Gardens of London* uncovers some unfamiliar recreational sites such as the British and Foreign Sailors' Church in Stepney (above right).

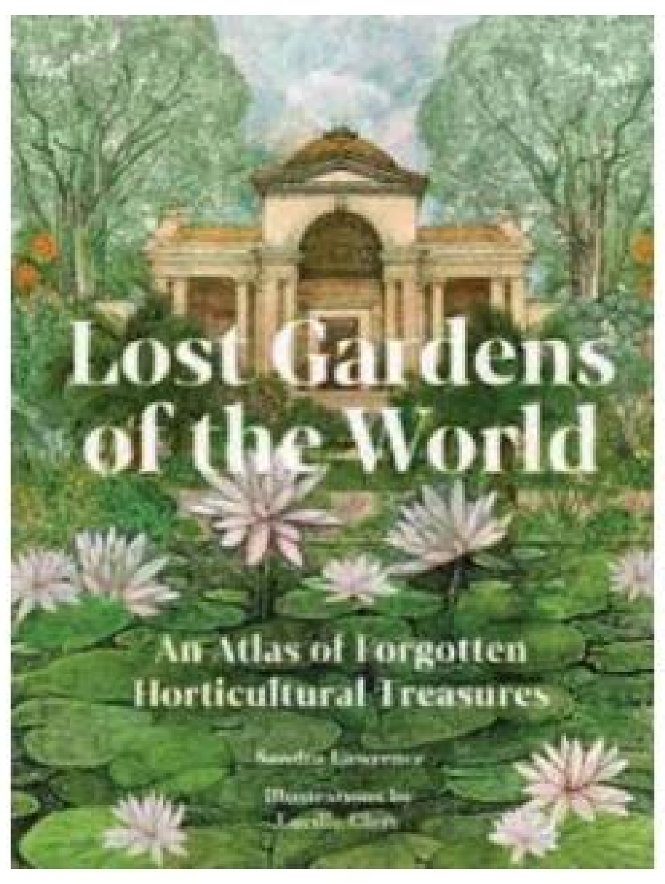




NEW-FOUND DELIGHTS

Two new books approach the topic of 'lost' gardens' in different ways – both of them beautifully illustrated and both scoring a success, says **Tim Richardson**





Lost Gardens of the World
An Atlas of Forgotten Horticultural Treasures
Sandra Lawrence
Illustrations by Lucille Clerc

LOST GARDENS OF LONDON
by Todd Longstaffe-Gowan
Modern Art Press, £25
ISBN 978-1738487806

LOST GARDENS OF THE WORLD: AN ATLAS OF FORGOTTEN HORTICULTURAL TREASURES
by Sandra Lawrence
Frances Lincoln, £19.99
ISBN 978-0711292680

Every garden can be considered 'lost', to a degree, because of the inherent mutability of plants, the depredations of the weather and neglect. Yet it remains a seductive concept, finessed in different ways in the two new books under review.

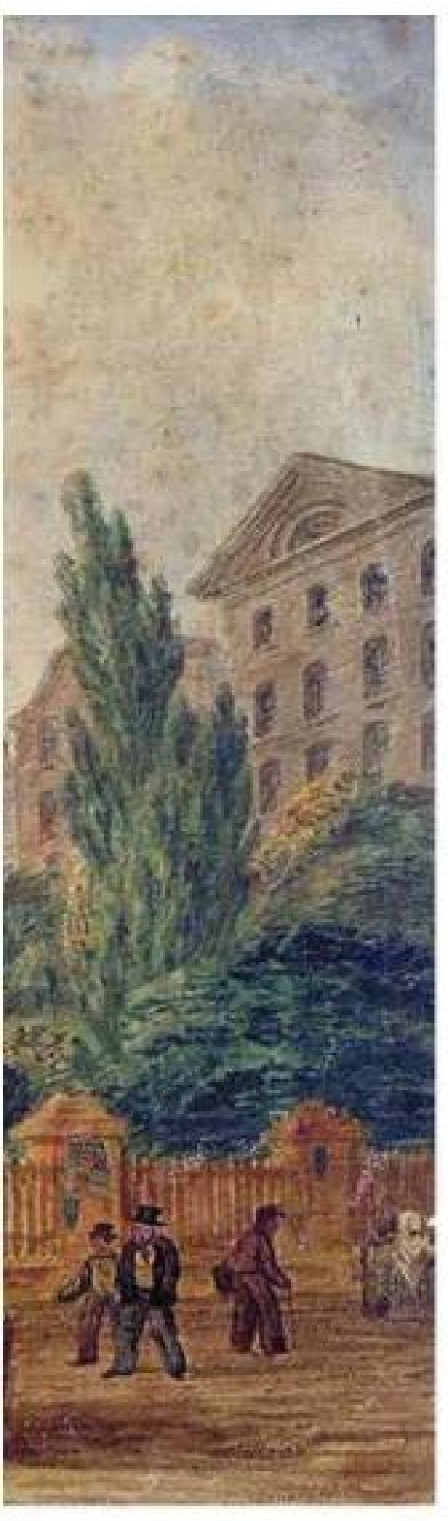
Following on from the success of his last book, *English Garden Eccentrics* (2022), Todd Longstaffe-Gowan here reprises his role as a connoisseur of garden curiosities – all of them this time situated in the capital city (or at least, within the M25).

The book is structured chronologically, starting with the earliest recorded London gardens, such as those at royal Sheen (later Richmond) Palace, completed in 1501, and the lavish courtyard gardens in the 'palaces' situated along the Strand, recently chronicled in a fine book by Manolo Guerci (whom the author rightly acknowledges). Modern references are occasionally dropped in, to disarming effect – including mention of the Marble Arch 'mount', which was erected by Westminster Council in 2021, for no discernible reason; it was widely mocked and closed within six months.

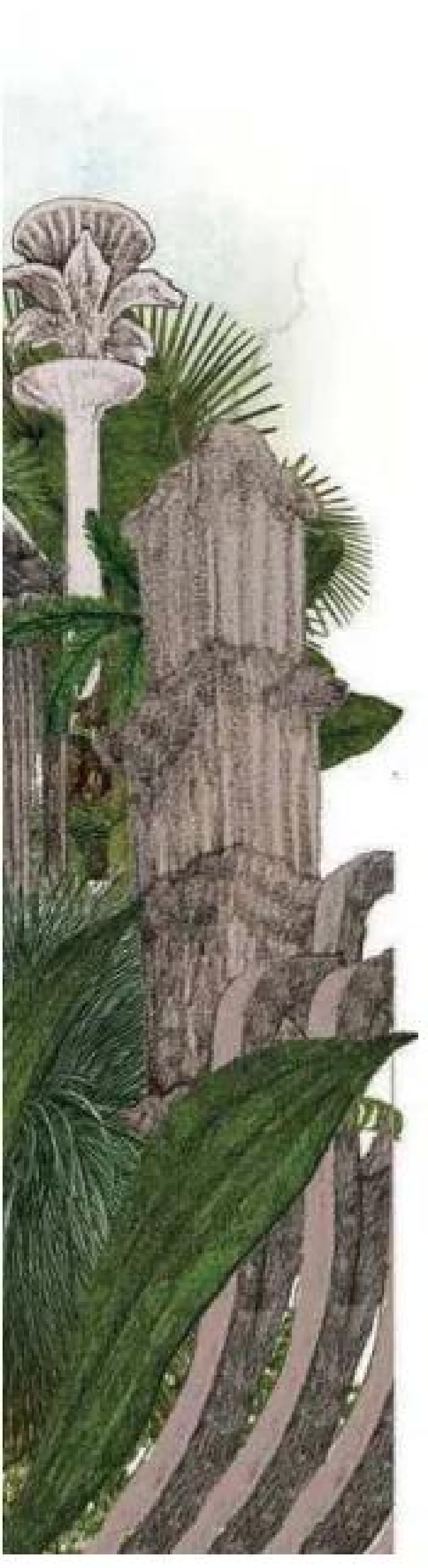
If there is a theme to the book – and the author himself attempts no overview – it is perhaps the notion of 'spectacle', since so many London gardens (such as the aforementioned mount) were made to impress, often involving entrance fees. Doomed enterprises such as the menageries of exotic animals and birds to be found at Oxford Street and Earl's Court in the mid 19th century, or the Notting Hill racecourse, which flourished for a few years west of the Portobello Road, are fun to read about and have not been described in such detail anywhere else.

There is much else that is unfamiliar or original to be enjoyed here. The chapter on pleasure gardens, for example, covers Vauxhall, as it must, but equally the lesser known (and cheaper) White Conduit House in Pentonville, which boasted a cricket pitch and a model church with a delightful ring of bells. Its horticultural display was said to be superior than Vauxhall's, with the shrubberies 'brilliantly illuminated' at night. We also learn of the 18th-century Peerless Pool, an open-air swimming spot, with an adjacent

LOST GARDENS OF LONDON: ARTIST UNKNOWN, EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE OLD DANISH–NORWEGIAN CHURCH, WELLCLOSE SQUARE, STEPNEY, WHICH BECAME THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN SAILORS' CHURCH IN 1845, C.1845, WATERCOLOUR, PRIVATE COLLECTION; *LOST GARDENS OF THE WORLD*: ILLUSTRATIONS BY LUCILLE CLERC.



There is much that is unfamiliar or original to be enjoyed here, with amusing stories, all of them well told and reliable in their detail



fishing pond, situated on the north side of Old Street. Here, customers could enjoy 'warm sea-water baths' even in this most urban of settings. The book is packed with such glimpses of London's horticultural past, where garden spaces have often been transient affairs. It is beautifully illustrated and filled with amusing stories, all of them well told and reliable in their detail.

Sandra Lawrence's *Lost Gardens of the World* is altogether more lightweight but certainly has its charms. The selection criteria are a little mysterious, since many of the places described are today by no means 'lost', and are in fact extremely well known – gardens such as Heligan, Het Loo and the Villa d'Este. More welcome is the way entries are complemented not by photographs but by colourful, attractive and distinctive illustrations.

Ultimately, this is an enjoyable, light-touch romp through gardens which in most cases have suffered from neglect at some point. Scattered among the 'greatest hits' are a number of unfamiliar gardens. There are revealing entries on Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest estate, which is now being conserved to focus on the lives of his enslaved workforce, and I had never even heard of Fontana Rosa, at Menton on the French Riviera, a derelict 'theatrical' extravaganza created by a Spanish novelist in the 1920s. I also knew nothing of the part-restored Garden of Dreams in Kathmandu, or the garden at the Madinat al-Zahra, or 'shining city', near Cordoba – the oldest of Spain's Islamic gardens, destroyed in 1013 and now gradually being unearthed. This is an idiosyncratic but engagingly readable book – a suitable gift for general readers and garden enthusiasts alike. □

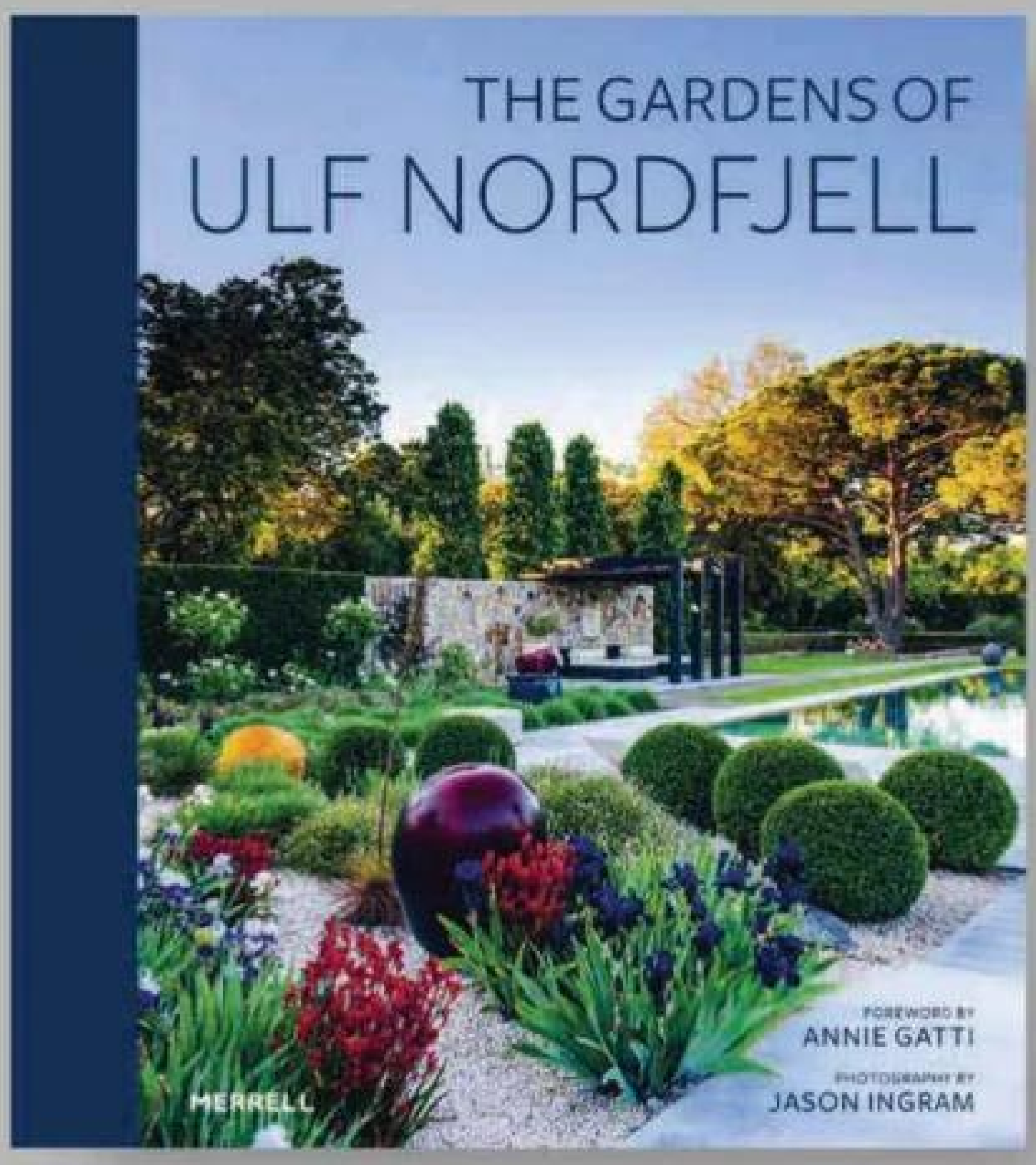
Reviewer **Tim Richardson** is a writer on gardens and art, and the points where the two intersect.

An exhibition, *Lost Gardens of London*, can be seen at the Garden Museum from 23 October 2024 to 2 March 2025. **gardenmuseum.org.uk**

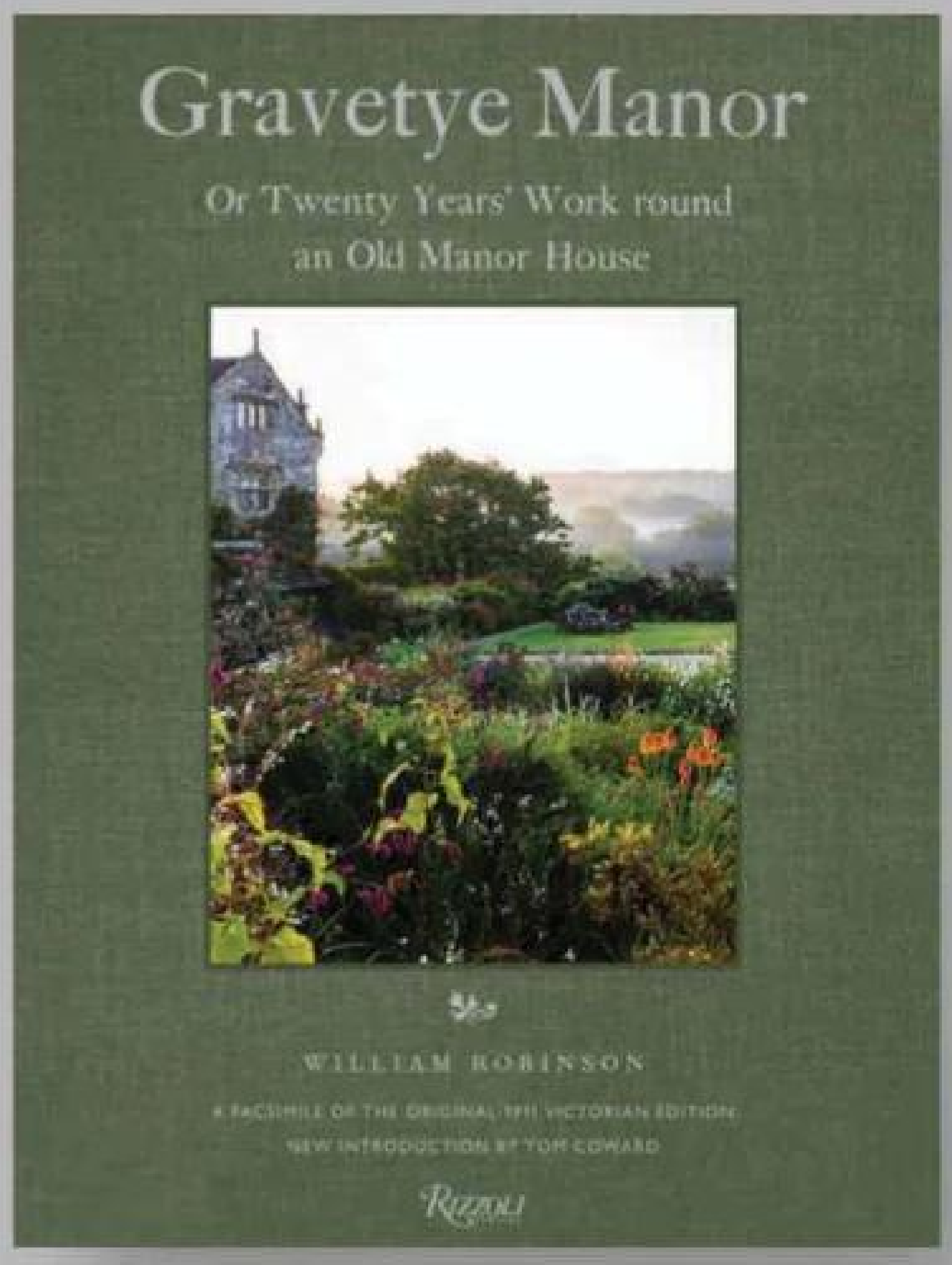
Recommended reads this month

JO KIRBY
The Good Slug Guide
How to tackle the slugs and snails in your garden and help save the planet

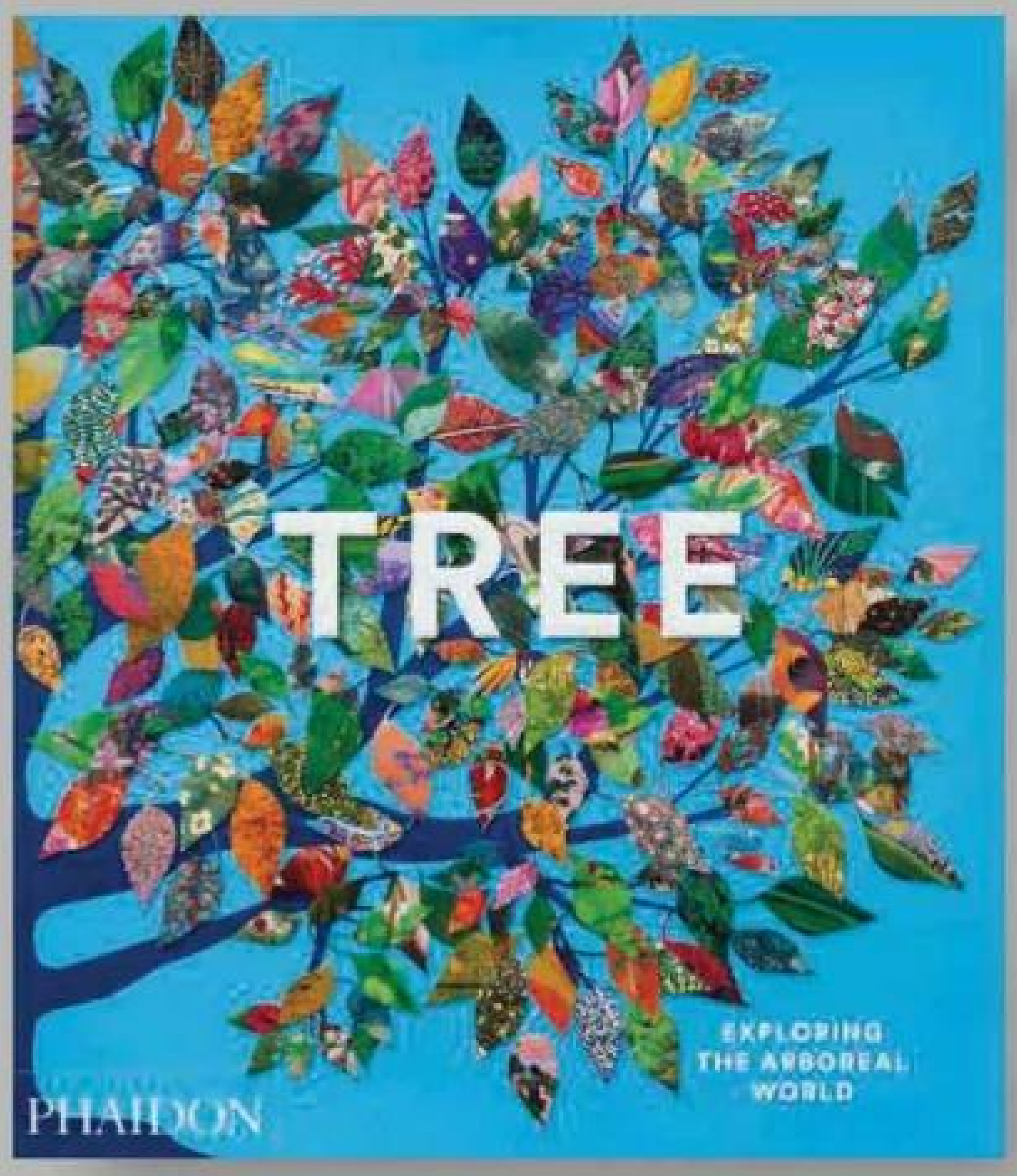
THE GOOD SLUG GUIDE: HOW TO TACKLE THE SLUGS AND SNAILS IN YOUR GARDEN AND HELP SAVE THE PLANET
by Jo Kirby
Pimpernel Press, £12.99
ISBN 978-1914902253
The ecologist and gardener takes a fresh look at how we deal with slugs (and snails) in our gardens. It explains why the usual controls often don't work, and highlights the seven slugs and one snail that do the most damage. Plus the 75 natural enemies of slugs and snails that can be found in UK gardens.



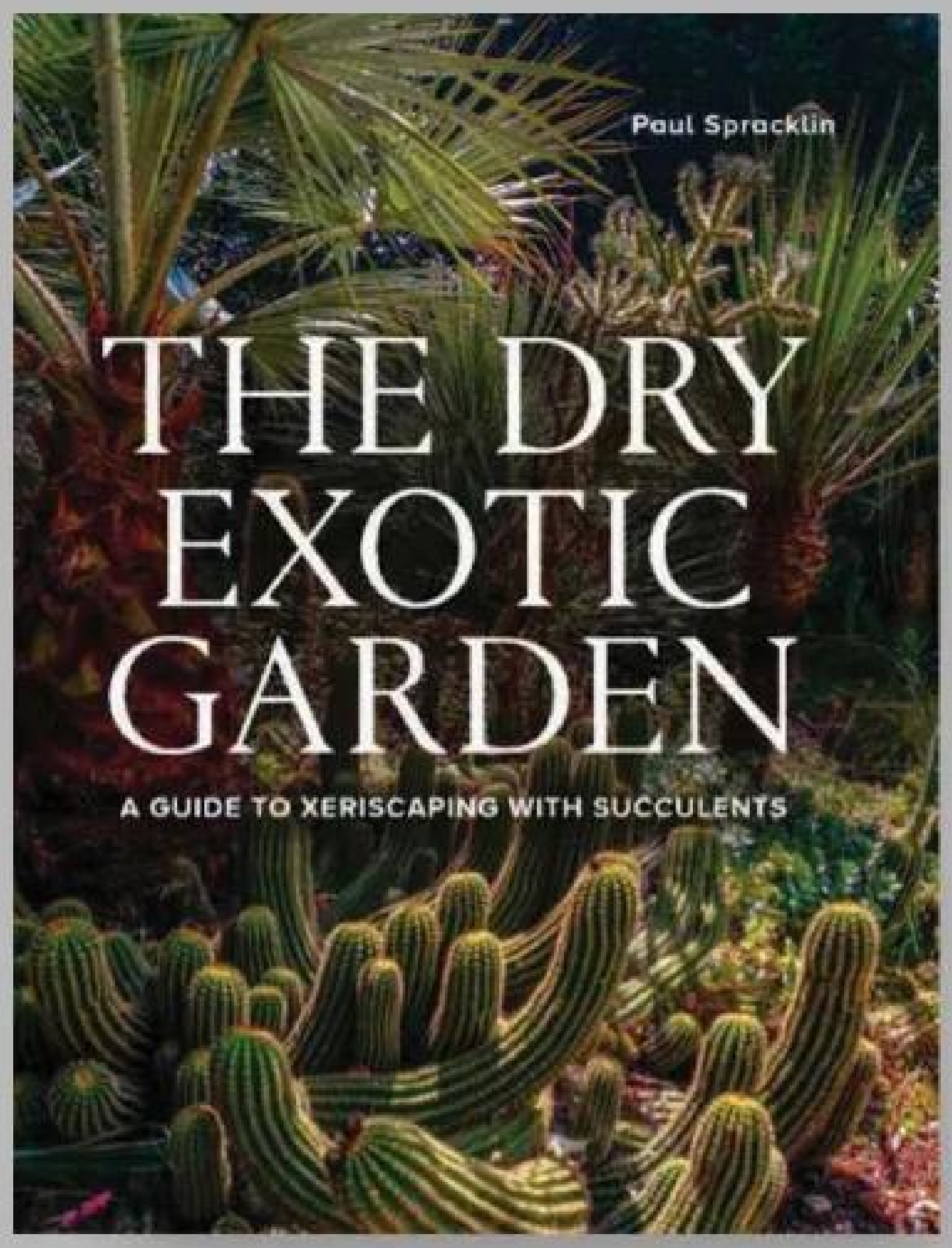
THE GARDENS OF ULF NORDFJELL
by Ulf Nordfjell, foreword by Annie Gatti, photographs by Jason Ingram
Merrell, £40
ISBN 978-1858947198
Features ten new projects by renowned garden designer and landscape architect Ulf Nordfjell. Drawing on 40 years' experience, Nordfjell reveals how each garden was designed to fit within its landscape and considers the impact of climate change on our gardens and parks.



GRAVETYE MANOR: 20 YEARS' WORK ROUND AN OLD MANOR HOUSE
by William Robinson, foreword by Tom Coward
Rizzoli, £88.50
ISBN 978-0847837670
Gravetye Manor is considered one of England's most exquisite gardens, and its creator William Robinson was a pioneer of the naturalistic planting style we know today. This spectacular, oversized facsimile edition of the previous text by Robinson has new colour photos and a foreword by current head gardener, Tom Coward.



TREE: EXPLORING THE ARBOREAL WORLD
by Phaidon editors, foreword by Tony Kirkham
Phaidon, £44.95
ISBN 978-1838667795
This sumptuous book captures the appeal of trees throughout history and the creative responses they have inspired. Curated with art historians, conservationists, botanists, climate scientists and museum curators, the book juxtaposes everything from 11th-century tapestries and 19th-century lithographs to sculptures and jewellery.



THE DRY EXOTIC GARDEN : A GARDENER'S GUIDE TO XERISCAPING WITH SUCCULENTS
by Paul Spracklin
Crowood, £30
ISBN 978-0719844164
Xeriscaping, or dry gardening – the practice of landscaping with minimal water – is becoming more popular. A sub-tropical garden designer advises on how to design, choose and plant cacti and succulents, whether you're planning a garden overhaul or planting a few containers.

NICOLA SMITH

'I didn't harvest a single carrot. That was a sharp lesson'

No-dig expert, market gardener and author Charles Dowding talks about his new book, the books he reads, and what he's up to next

What is your new book about? It's a companion to my *No Dig* guide (2022). There are chapters on compost in pretty much every book I've written, but I've never majored on the subject. My aim here was to set composting out in clear terms – I don't want to give readers a recipe, I want them to understand what they're doing so that they can find a method that works for them.

What did you learn from writing it? I had to do extra research and justify the things I've been doing or believing. That's what I love about my work – it's based on what I do or what I can trial, and then I'll share what works.

What one idea would you like to share from the book? Line your heap on the inside with something like cardboard to hold the moisture and warmth. I know this contradicts most of what's commonly advised about having open sides, to let air in. But we don't want air flowing into our heap, where it's going to dry the materials and cool them down. It's all about trapping the air with enough brown materials such as small pieces of wood, and keeping access without it getting soggy, as too much water also excludes air. I've only been lining my pallet heaps with cardboard for about five years, and the difference is phenomenal. If you've got a heap, keep it open while you're adding to it, but as soon as the heap is finished, cover it against the rain.

What books are on your shelves? I like older books by people such as organic gardening pioneers Albert Howard and Eve Balfour. I also enjoy old farming books. You can find forgotten jewels or ideas. But a lot of the rules seem to come from Victorian times, where owners of stately homes had an excess of labour and were looking for jobs for their gardeners in the winter, such as double digging and pot washing. I don't brush out my module trays between uses and I certainly never sterilise them.

What sparked your interest in gardening? Picking raspberries in the garden with my mother, when I was about 14. I loved raspberries, but more than anything it was about working with my mother. When I was about 18 she persuaded me to help her to plant some trees. I'd done farm work, sitting on a tractor, but not the more manual gardening jobs. I really enjoyed it.

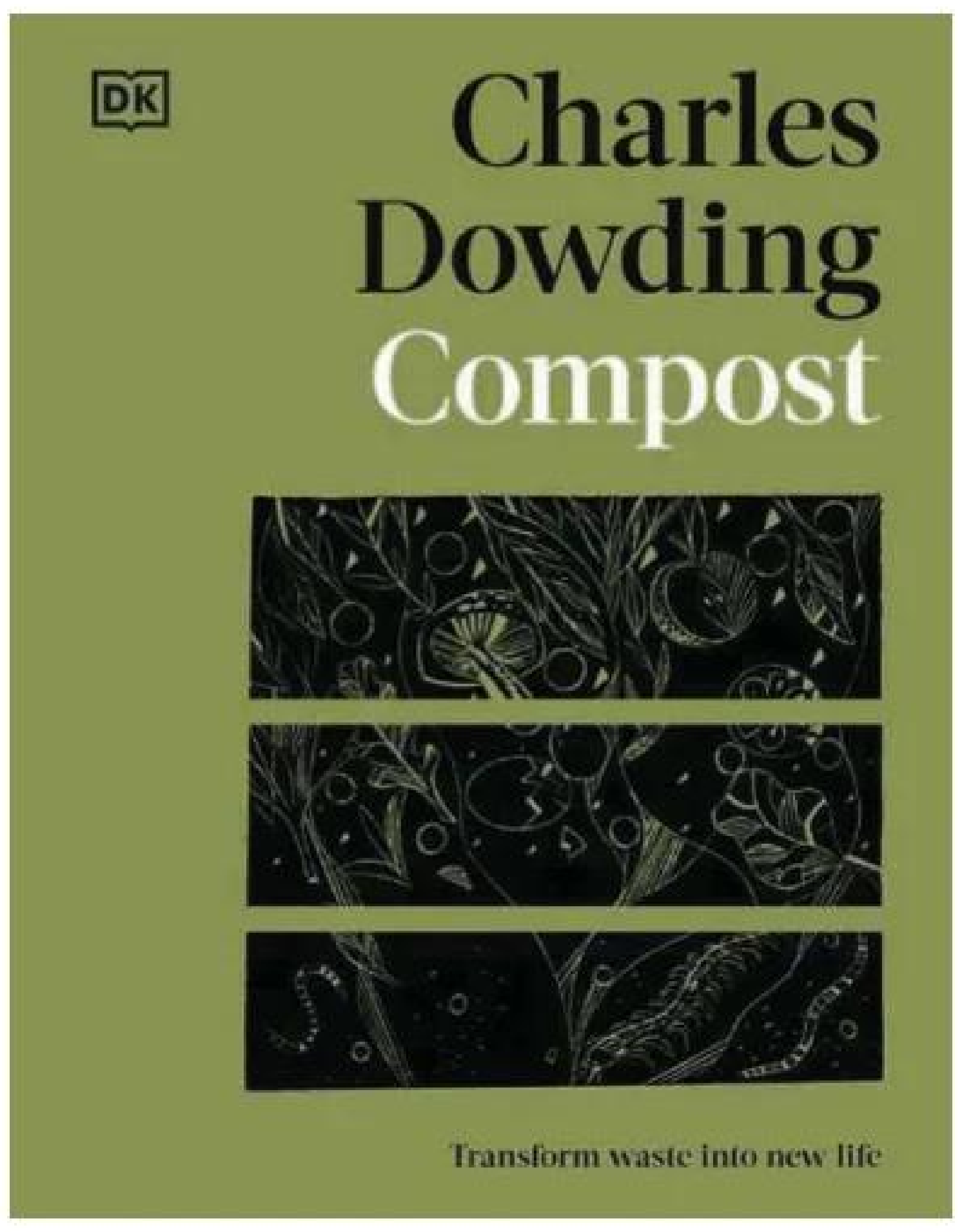
Do you have any plans for your current garden? Not to extend it! I've got over two-fifths of an acre of very intensively cropped beds. It's set up in such a way that I need to be there for a lot of the time to make it look really good. I'm thinking more about how I can keep it running, maybe more efficiently, and having more time for travelling and teaching, because I'm getting invitations to speak around the world.

What is your biggest growing failure? Getting too ambitious back in the 1980s. I had seven-and-a-half acres of no-dig raised beds and was asked by a wholesaler in London to grow an extra acre of carrots. I borrowed a rotavator and paid a contractor to drill the carrots. All I got coming up was chickweed – I didn't harvest a single carrot. That was a sharp lesson in not overextending. It was also a real reinforcement of no dig, as it's such a brilliant way of controlling weeds. I still make mistakes and still learn. But I never try new things on too big a scale.

Do you have any guilty gardening secrets? I struggle with houseplants. But I don't beat myself up about it – it's just a different skill.

What's your favourite garden to visit? The Newt in Somerset. The Roman villa is my favourite part – I grew up just a mile from there and would never have imagined anyone building an actual villa near the remains that I visited as a six-year-old. Ellie Dunn, who runs the main vegetable garden, has a good understanding of no dig. I also love the kitchen garden at Sissinghurst. It's a really good advert for growing your own, for no dig and for compost.

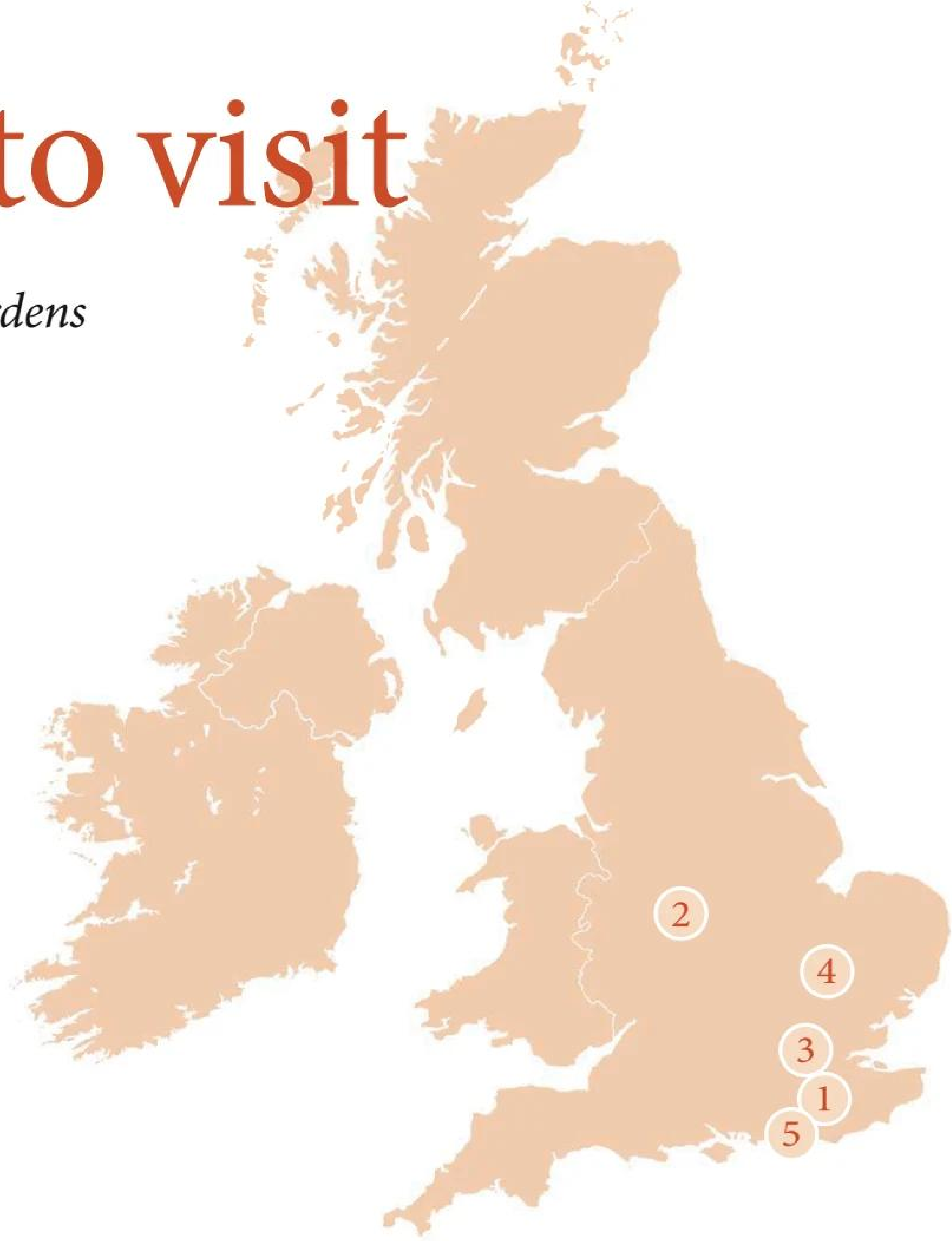
What else are you up to at the moment? I've got a busy winter of writing ahead, revising my first book on organic gardening and my online courses. And I'm looking to travel much more.



COMPOST: TRANSFORM WASTE INTO NEW LIFE
by Charles Dowding
DK, £14.99
ISBN 978-0241661543

Autumn gardens to visit

Autumn is a great time to visit this collection of glorious gardens



1 HEVER CASTLE & GARDENS

Autumn is the season when Hever's striking trees come to the fore. Colour abounds with vivid maples and brilliant beech. Boston ivy scrambles up the castle walls whilst *Vitis coignetiae* clothes bridges and pergolas with crimson. Visit on a still day for the very best views of reflections in the moats and lake.

Edenbridge, Kent TN8 7NG | 01732 865224 | hevercastle.co.uk

2 BLUEBELL ARBORETUM & NURSERY

Visit our tranquil, nine-acre, woodland garden full of unusual trees and shrubs, many of which have been planted for their superb autumn colours. Many of the rarities on display are available for sale from our adjoining specialist plant nursery. RHS Partner Garden.

Smisby, South Derbyshire LE65 2TA | 01530 413700 | bluebellnursery.com

3 CHELSEA PHYSIC GARDEN

London's oldest botanic garden is five minutes from the popular King's Road in Chelsea. This four-acre garden is open to visitors Sunday – Friday, and Flexi Tickets are bookable online that are valid for up to three months. Perfect for the changeable British weather! More about tickets and special events on the website.

London SW3 4HS | chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk

4 CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY BOTANIC GARDEN

Discover Cambridge University Botanic Garden: 40 acres, 8,000 plant species, stunning gardens and glasshouses in the heart of Cambridge. Enjoy plant science insights, trails, tours, events, courses and free family activities. A year-round oasis of beauty and inspiration. Open daily from 10am.

1 Brookside, Cambridge CB2 1JE | botanic.cam.ac.uk

5 DENMANS GARDEN

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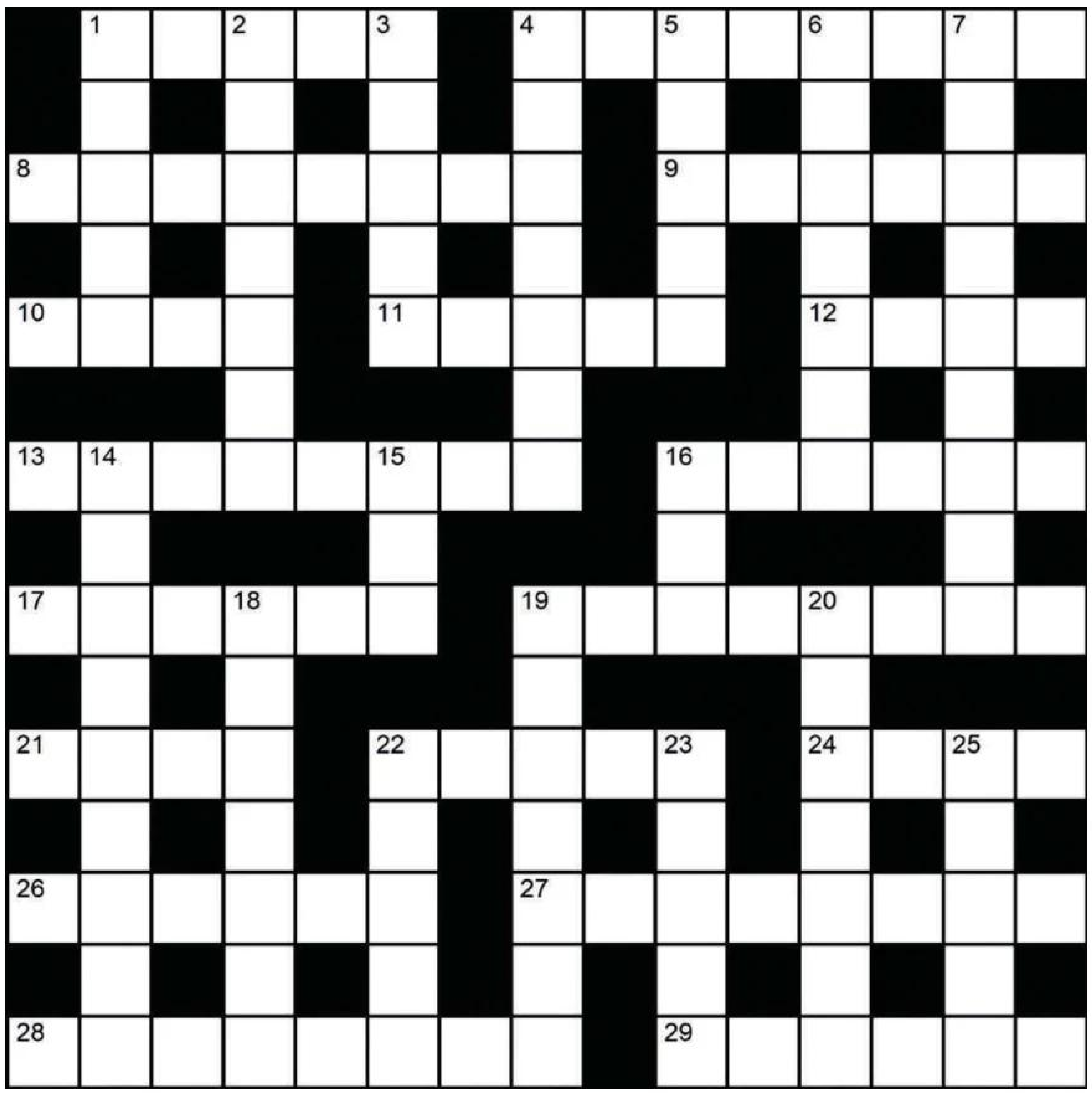
Crossword



ACROSS
1 Genus of 'plantain lily', with decorative foliage (5)
4 Common name of *Saponaria officinalis* – sort of wraps, too (8)
8 *Dianthus* species with blood-red flowers – nurse cut badly (8)
9 As a plant does on losing sap, eg on pruning (6)
10 Term for a lower petal of a bearded iris (4)
11 They mark a tree's seasonal growth (5)
12 Genus of shrubs aka sweetspire – produces one beverage! (4)
13 Species name for yellow-gold as eg foliage of *Veronica* ___ 'James Stirling' – damaged her cacao (8)
16 An *Echinacea* (coneflower) series – 'Great Heavens'? (3,3)
17 Spindle *Euonymus* ___ (or 'winged') (6)
19 Rusty-red flowering *Tagetes*; also a red/black moth (8)
21 Use miniature secateurs – a bargain! (4)
22 Taxonomic group of one or more species (5)
24 A named *Pinus mugo* (dwarf pine) – cleans the floor? (4)
26 Species term meaning wrinkled, as leaves of *Rosa* ___ 'Rubra' (6)
27 A pear Tim confused for the genus of perennial, ornamental grasses (8)
28 Genus of summer-flowering bulbs with bell-shaped flowers – got liana twisted (8)
29 Eg simple greenhouse needing wall support (4-2)

DOWN
1 Species term meaning 'hairy' … 'hot air disturbed, oxygen removed' (5)
2 Compact zonal pelargoniums with star-shaped flowers (7)
3 Popular plant of the daisy family (5)
4 Named creamy-yellow double Tumbelina petunia – N. Nassau variation (7)
5 Term describing white part of ornamental bush (5)
6 Crying: "Such is the habit of pendulous plants!" (7)
7 Genus of plant aka black-eye Susan and coneflower (9)
14 Pot marigold genus – Alan clued as an anagram! (9)
15 Lettuce with crisp, narrow leaves (3)
16 Compost container, say … covered by *Robinia* (3)
18 Edible part of eg carrot or turnip (7)
19 Species meaning 'shining white', as in *Sidalcea* ____ – and acid perhaps (7)
20 The thrift genus – held by farmer Ian (7)
22 Arrangement of fibres in wood dictated by tree growth (5)
23 Part of a calyx – in glasshouse palm (5)
25 Named series of dwarf hibiscus … not big in France! (5)

• Solutions to this issue's crossword will be printed in the November issue

SOLUTIONS TO SEPTEMBER CROSSWORD

ACROSS 1 Flag **4** Blackthorn **9** Pinus **10** Alyssum **11** Eggs **12** Leics **14** Iron
15 Treasure **17** Renown **19** Ramble **21** Greenfly **23** Spur **25** Oxlip **27** Rust
28 Rosetta **31** Lysimachia **32** Acer.

DOWN 2/30 Lapageria rosea **3** Genista **4** Basal **5** Amarine **6** Key **7** Hessian **8** Romeo
13 Scree **16** Unedo **18** Wolfsbane **20** Borisii **21** Goliath **22** Nerissa **24** Percy **26** Parma **29** Tea.

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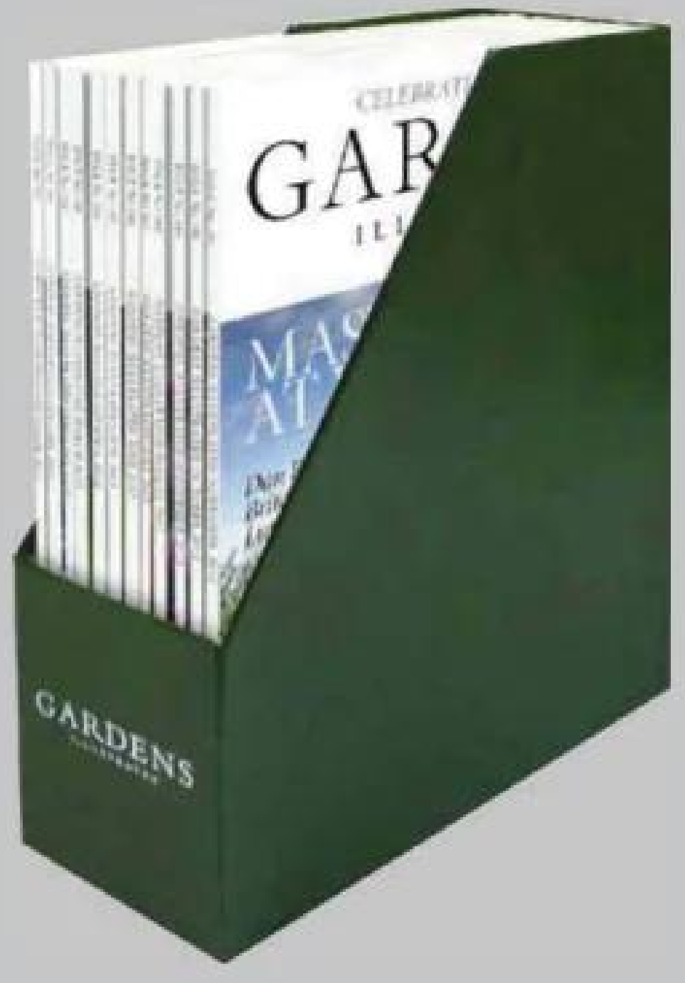

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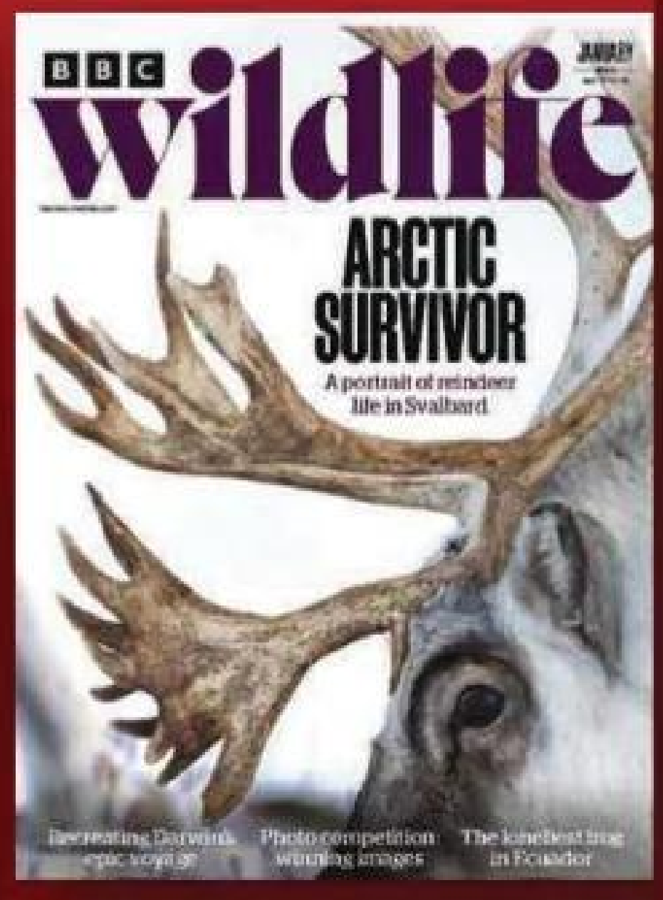
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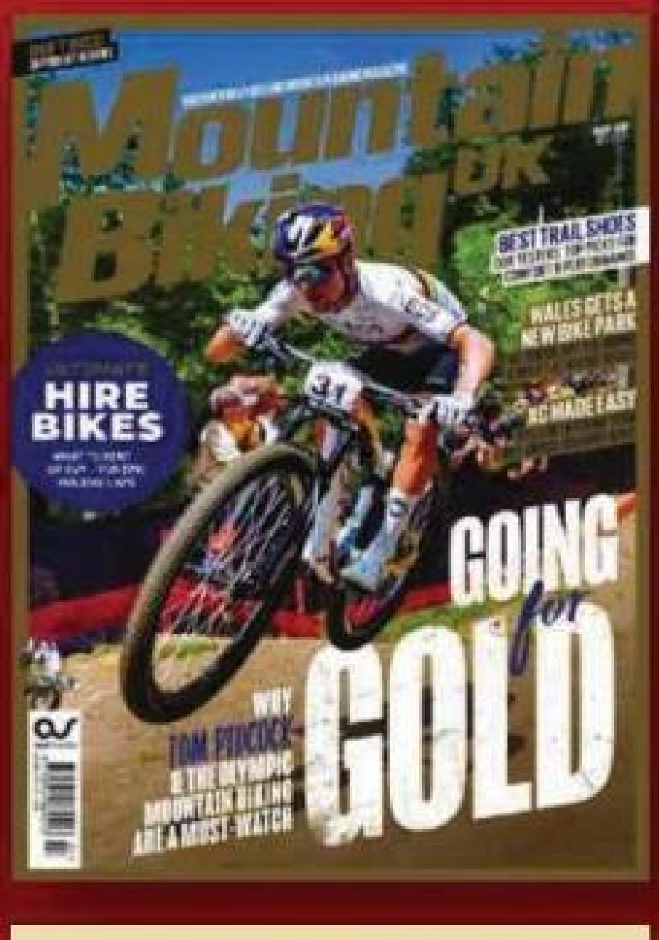
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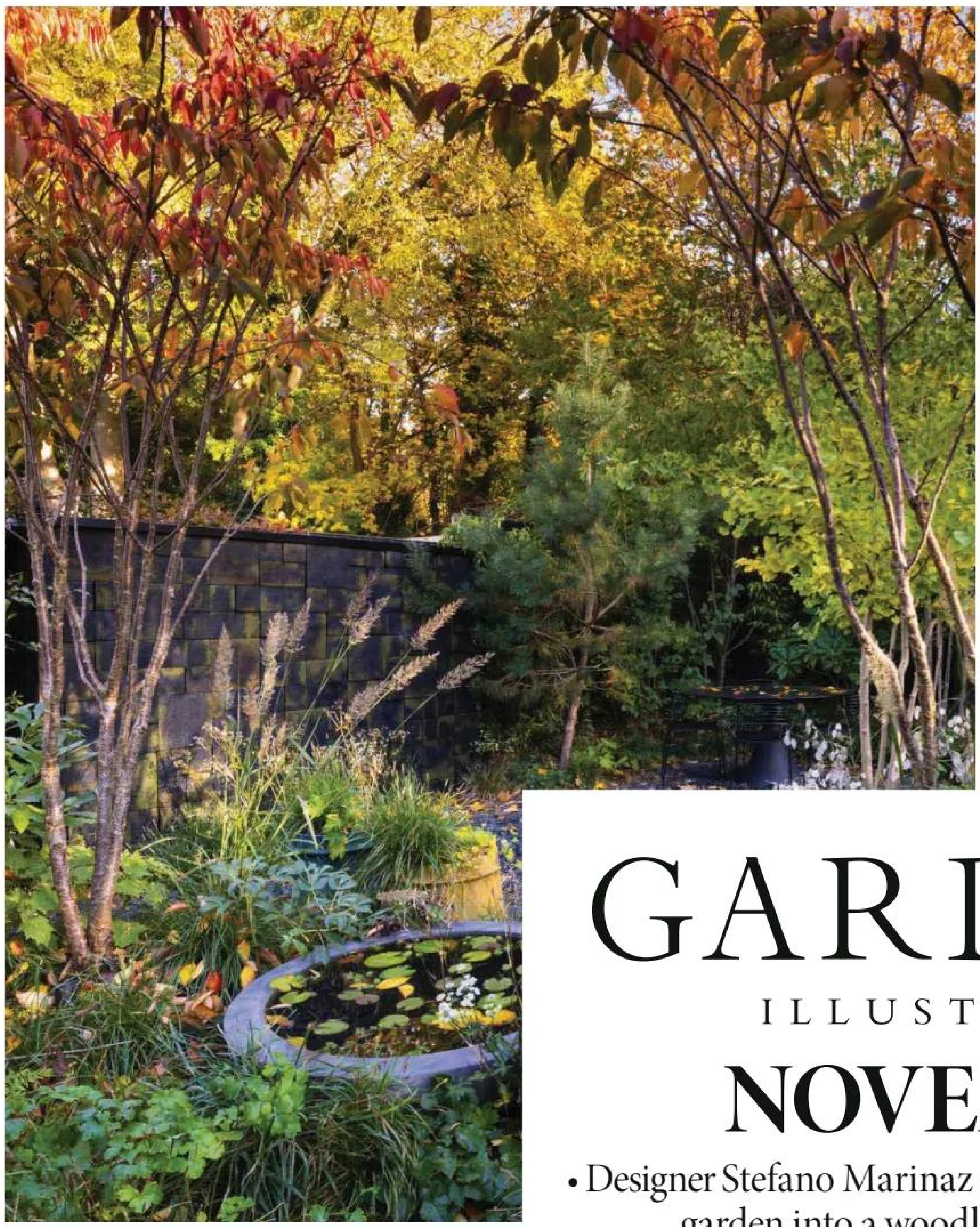

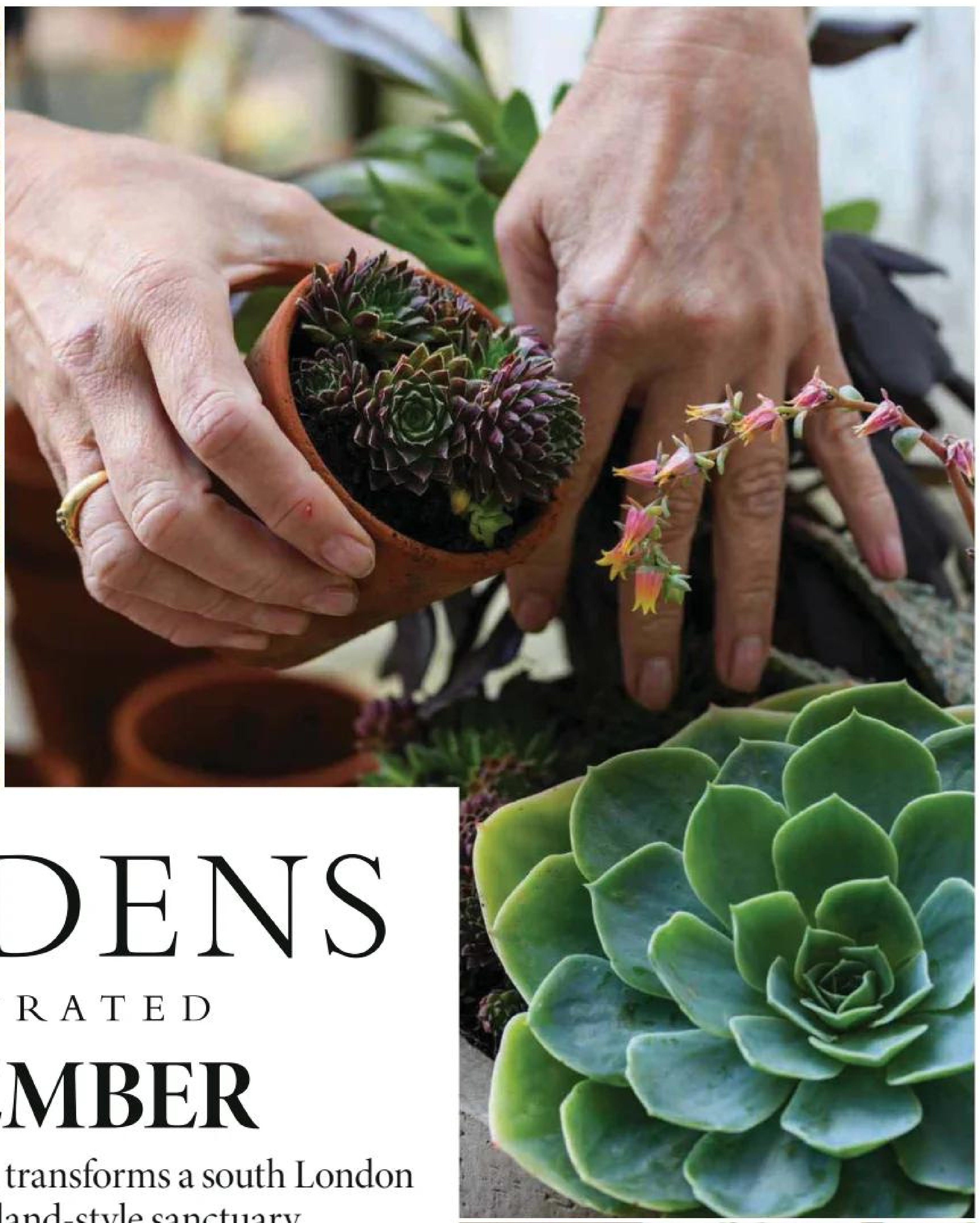

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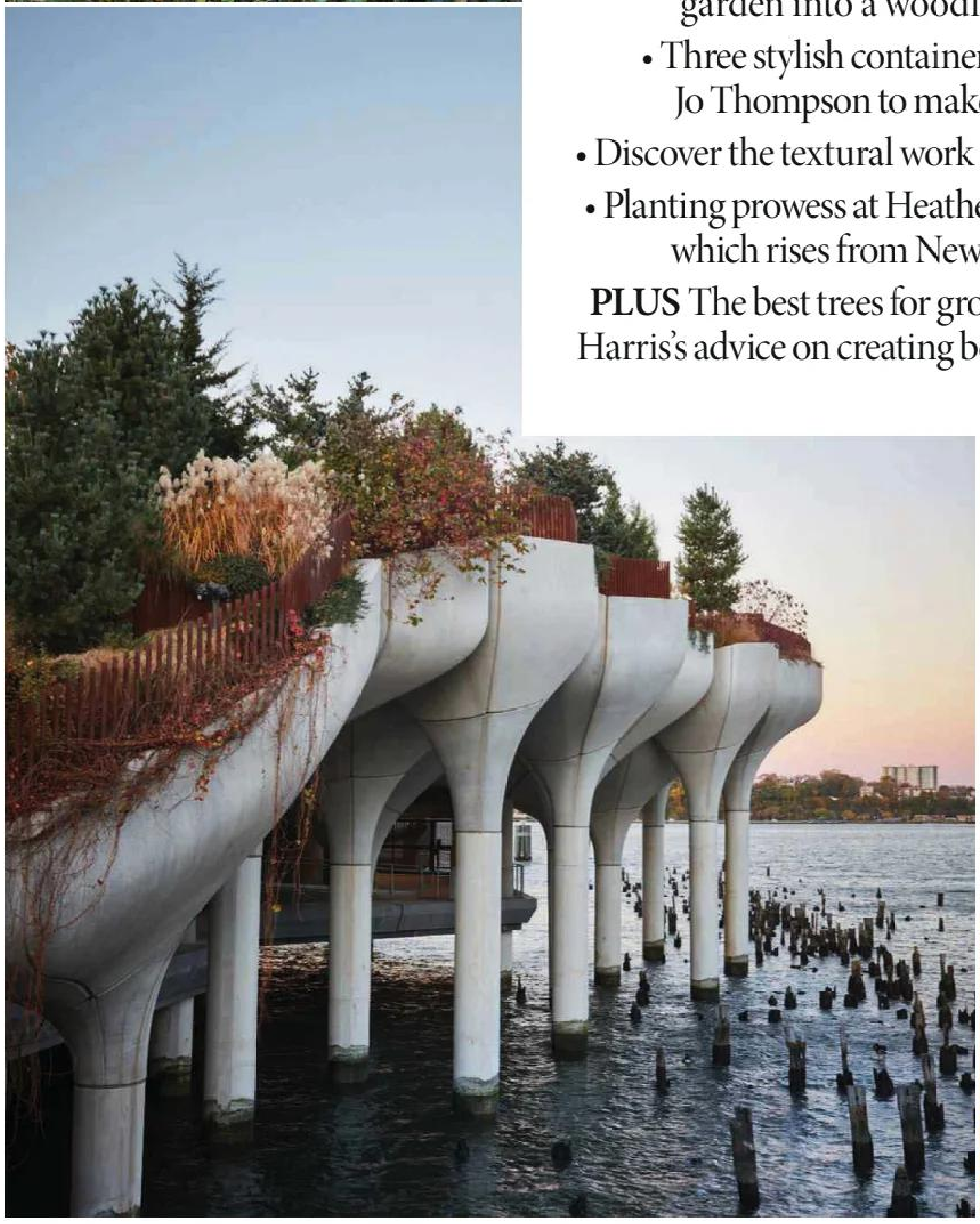

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WHY SHOULD I VOLUNTEER?

Giving your free time to volunteer in the community or as a mentor can have a big impact, and also benefit you in ways you can't imagine, says **John Wyer**

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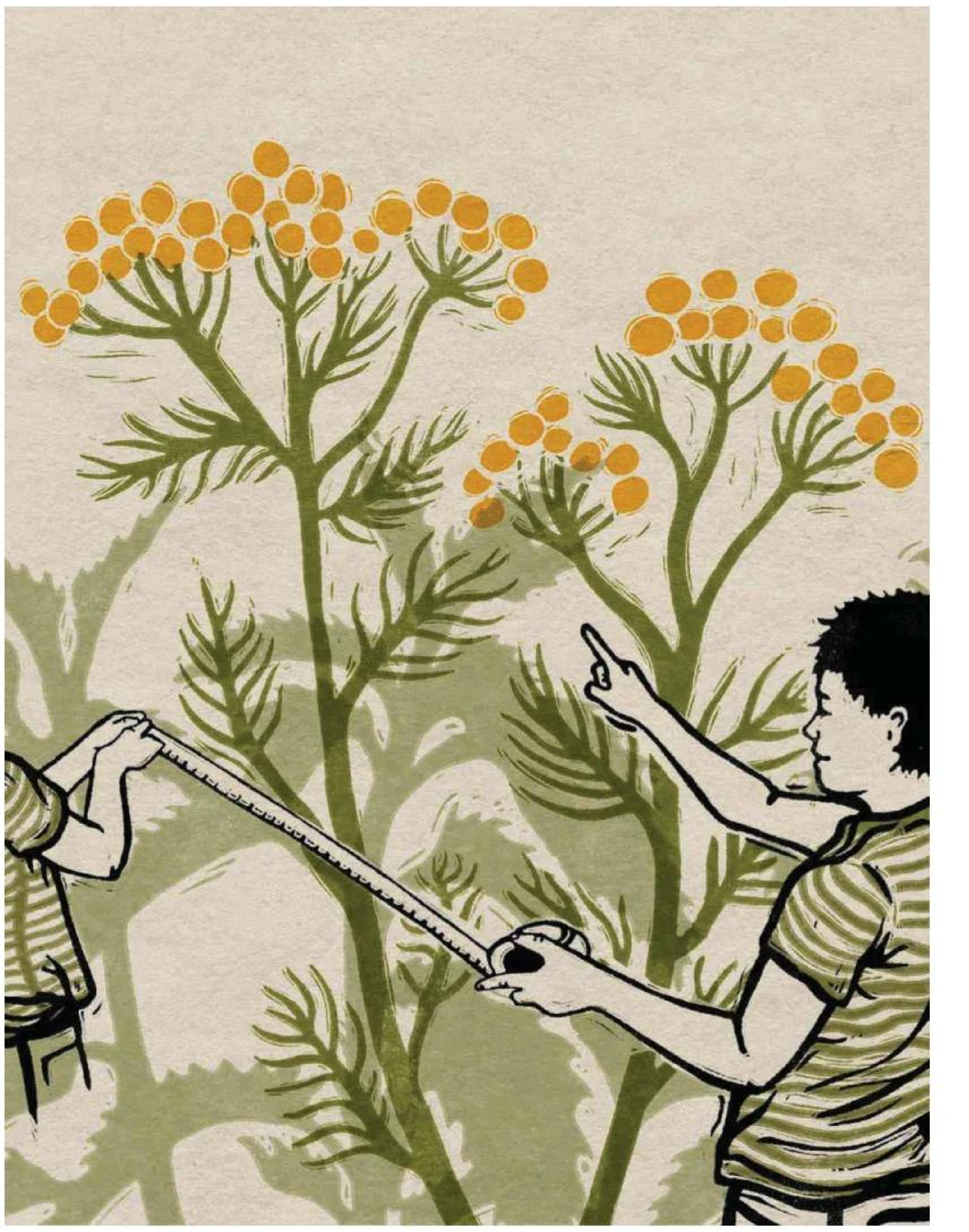

There is treasure to be discovered in sharing a career's worth of knowledge and experience

It's a Saturday morning in the summer of 2000. I'm standing in a huge patch of nettles in a forgotten area in the corner of a public park, holding the 'stupid end' of a long measuring tape. I'm not there entirely of my own volition, but there, nonetheless. Just then, a boy, perhaps 11 years old, comes up and asks what I am doing. I can see a second boy hanging back.

"I'm measuring," I reply.

He looks at me, as I stand still, holding the end of the tape. We're both silent for a moment.

"Why?" he asks, not unreasonably.

"Well, we're going to make a garden here, and before we can do that, we need a plan showing where everything is."

I can see that he's not sure about this. This time, warily:

"Are you from the council?"

"No, we're not from the council."

He brightens again. "Can I help, then?"

Five minutes later, Paul and his friend are busy holding tapes, shouting out measurements, and running back and forth with poles, putting my initial lack of enthusiasm to shame.

Many years on, not only has that garden blossomed and grown into a community resource, but it has sprouted other projects too. There are regular therapeutic horticulture sessions for people with learning disabilities and mental health issues, or simply for those who want to get outside and do some gardening but don't have a space of their own. There's a forest school, a teenage project, courses in botanical dyeing, foraging, cooking and a host of other things. And for the first four or five years of that period, Paul and his friend continued to be enthusiastic participants in the garden project – until beer and girls became slightly more interesting.

There are many reasons for getting involved as a volunteer, but for me, this story wraps up a couple of the more important and perhaps altruistic outcomes. The first is the – sometimes surprising – immediate effect. As I stood there reluctantly in the nettles, I was quickly engaged in their enthusiasm, instead of the other way around. Instant gratification. Of course, such outcomes don't always result. The second is the ripple effect. Those two boys, who knew nothing about gardening, went on to have a lasting connection to what we wanted to create. Paul's parents came to open days and other events. And for me, even though most of the hard work was done by others, that moment was when I threw my personal pebble in the pond. The ripples are still spreading.

I asked others involved in the project what their most rewarding moments are. The answers included running a volunteer day when you see people turn up, get stuck in and not only enjoy themselves, but also interact with others; and then, at the end of the session, appreciating what they have achieved together and staying to chat over a well-deserved cuppa.

There is another important lesson here – apart from the benefits of the gardening itself. Going there for the gardening and yet enjoying the company of others is a great bonus. It seems so obvious and trite to say that you can achieve more as a group than on your own, but we all tend to forget this.

For certain people, giving back takes a different shape. For someone who has spent a career accumulating knowledge and experience, there is treasure to be discovered in sharing that with others. This can be through mentoring, lectures, writing or simply giving advice. It reminds me of folk hero and apple farmer Johnny Appleseed, dispensing small seedlings and trees that years later would be great fruiters. Recently, someone told me that a single piece of advice I gave in a lecture about ten years ago changed the way they ran their business. I felt humbled by that, but also happy – this wasn't some great pearl of wisdom, just something that had worked for me and that I wanted to pass on.

I have always loved designing. However, over the past 20 years or so, I have discovered that I get as much pleasure in coaching others to achieve more than they initially thought they could as I do from completing my own designs. And unexpectedly, in doing so, I learn so much myself.

On Christmas Eve, many years ago, my father trotted out the immortal line familiar to all parents: 'You get more pleasure from giving presents than receiving them'. That can't be right, I thought. But of course, as we all know, it turns out to be true. □

- John Wyer is an award-winning designer and commentator.

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